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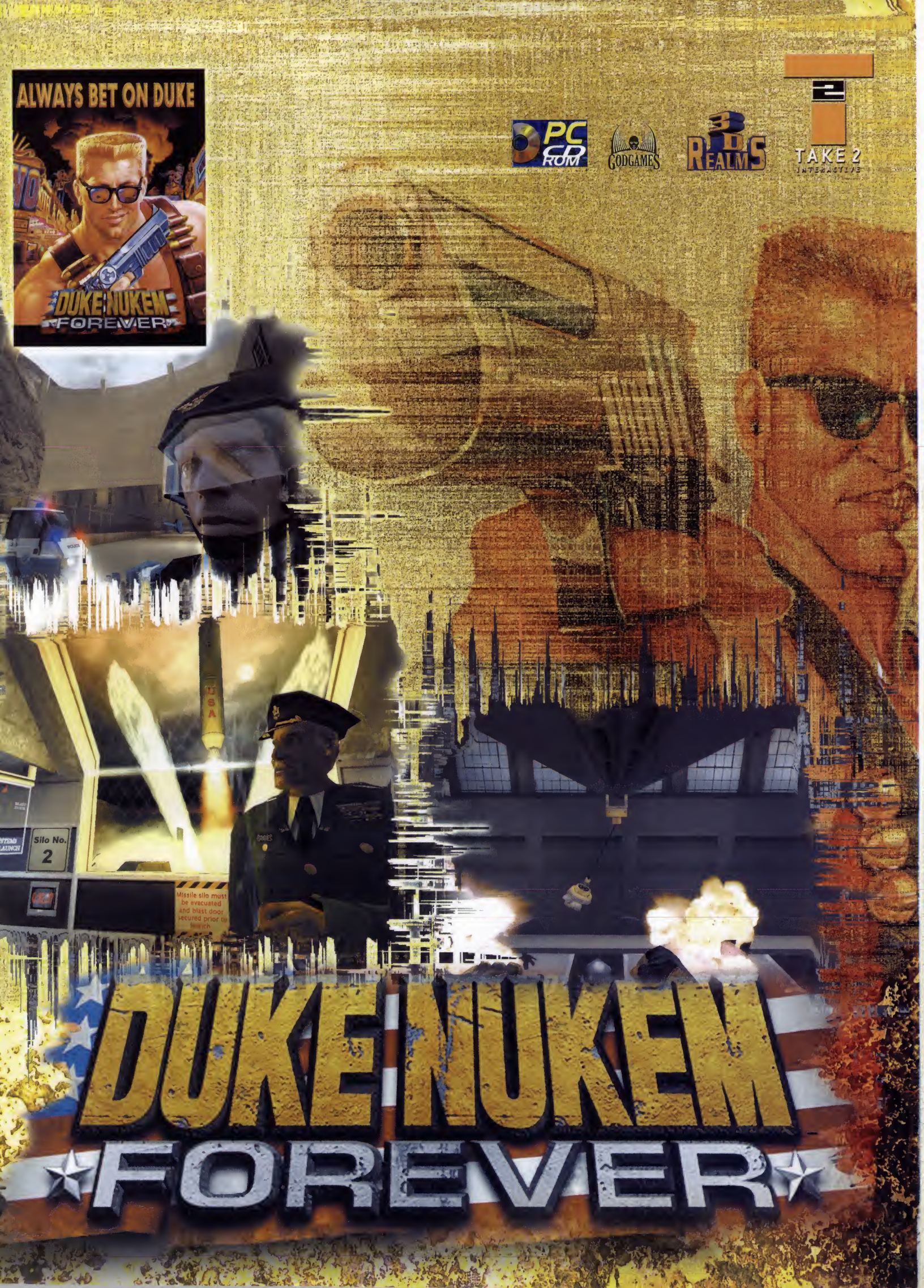


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THE REAL QUESTION

A popular topic amongst reader correspondence this month was realism. Perspectives ranged across why realistic games are superior to why realistic games are inferior, with the odd discussion of the hoary old link between violence and realism. It proved sufficient motivation to throw my own thoughts into the ring.

Perhaps it's necessary to define the term before the debate can proceed. What makes a game "realistic"? To a certain degree the look of the game is an important element: a realistic game ought to at least resemble the real world in visual terms. Repetitive textures, stilted animation, and inappropriate lighting all contribute to break the illusion of reality. Sound, too, plays a part here. To be realistic, a game needs audio that is plausible and coherent.

However, the primary test of a game's realism is in the extent of its world interaction. If that door cannot be opened, then it doesn't matter how intricately an artist has painted its texture map. In fact, the greater the graphical realism, the more the player expects to be able to open that door. Graphical detail doesn't confer realism so much as heighten player expectation that the gameworld will function like the real world.

Convincing world interaction is more than things behaving as they should. The consequences of such functions need to impact on the way the game plays. The per-pixel calculated exit wounds of Soldier of Fortune 2 are far less interesting than the ability to force an enemy to drop his weapon by injuring his arm. Technology advances should enable realism rather than merely supplying it in themselves.

Until that happens, realistic games are only ever realistic to a point. Few games actually deal with the realistic consequences of a player's actions. Soldier of Fortune depicts the immediate consequence of shooting someone in the head, but fails to offer even one alternative action for anyone unsettled by what they've done. All that's left to do is run down the corridor and repeat the unsavoury act.

Deus Ex is the game that goes the furthest in not only illustrating longer term consequences, but also in offering numerous alternative actions. This is the fundamental reason why its high place in our annual Top 100 feature is assured for the foreseeable future.

david@next.com.au



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GAMES OF ALL TIME
Who'll be left standing at the end?

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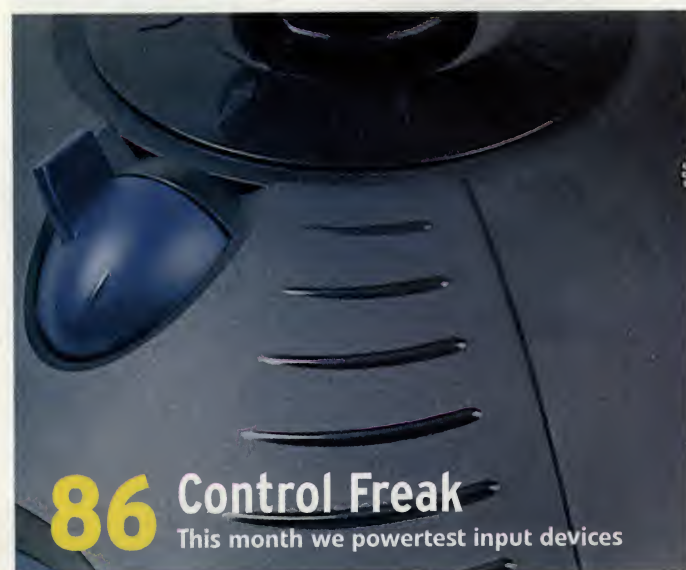
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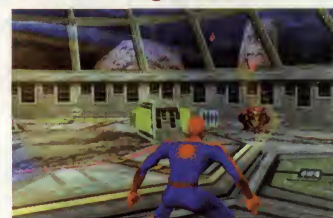
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Heroes of Might & Magic IV

VENERABLE STRATEGY SERIES GIVEN THOROUGH REVAMP

DETAILS

DEVELOPER

New World
Computing

PUBLISHER

3DO

AVAILABLE

4th Qtr

URL

www.mightandmagic.com





The isometric view grants a fresh look, though many other elements are very familiar



While the first three episodes in the Heroes of Might & Magic series steadily evolved the formula, adding more units, spells, heroes and towns each time, the fourth is gearing up to radically alter a host of gameplay mechanics. It's still recognisable as a Heroes game, but such a ruthless overhaul should make it a refreshingly new experience.

The most immediate change is the viewpoint provided of the world map and combat screen. Everything's gone isometric! In addition to this cosmetic alteration, the world map now allows for elevated terrain, while the combat screen has been enlarged to make room for even greater armies. Eagle-eyed readers will also note the construction of castle walls surrounding some towns in the screenshots.

The battle system functions differently, too. In a significant departure from the previous strictly turn-based formula, each attack is now met with a counter-attack. This

ought to shift the emphasis away from a creature's speed being its most vital asset - it may even make large stacks of peasants useful in a fight!

Keeping company

Heroes are now active participants in battle, rather than just sitting back to cast spells and add various combat bonuses. Of course they still do both, yet the option to wade into melee combat adds an intriguing tactical twist. There's also the potential to band heroes together, and even move creatures around the world map unescorted. The latter capacity extends to neutral armies as well, so expect to encounter genuine wandering monsters.

Town types are differentiated to a greater extent. There are six in all: Asylum, Necropolis, Stronghold, Haven, Academy and Preserve. The Stronghold fulfils the might equation of the game's title on its own; here the player won't be able to build a mage guild at all, relying instead upon faster unit

production and the most powerful creatures. The Haven is another iteration of the traditional Castle, while the other four are all new.

Magic has been tweaked, thanks to the decision to abandon the elemental schools (Fire, Earth, Water and Air) and replace them with the thematic schools of Order, Life, Nature, Chaos, Death, and Might. How many of the old spells will return and how many new ones will feature is unknown at this stage.

Revitalisation

In recent times, 3DO has been hellbent on diluting the Might & Magic franchise with near-identical episodes in the core RPG series and several rather lame spin-offs. However, on this evidence, it appears that Heroes remains untouched by such a mentality; a concerted effort has been made to revitalise the series rather than rehashing it. Needless to say, we're quite keen to play it.

David Wildgoose

WHY HEROES OF MIGHT AND MAGIC IV DEMANDS A SECOND LOOK...



■ The first Heroes was a great game...

■ Heroes II was rather good as well...

■ Heroes III was even better, surprisingly...

■ So the new stuff means this should be the best of the lot!

Spiderman

BITTEN BY AN ATOMIC SPIDER? SURE YOU WERE...

DETAILS

DEVELOPER

Neversoft

PUBLISHER

Activision

AVAILABLE

September

URL

www.neversoft.com



Texture detail screams PlayStation, but the strong gameplay should hold





We tend to cringe at the term 'port'. More often than not, it signals a slapped together reworking of a great console title that should have stayed on a familiar platform, thank you very much. However, such was the power of *Tony Hawk 2*, it not only united warring African nations on the brink of starvation but proved that a successful port was a possibility, if not a certainty.

These are the adventures of the all-action web-slangin' Spiderman; the story of a man, a spider and a love that could never be. The tenuous link between Mr 900 and Spidey goes further, as Neversoft has used a heavily modified version of the *Tony Hawk* engine for Spiderman.

Gaming senses tingling...

Street cred

Spiderman takes to the streets, or high above them rather, in full 3D. The

thirdperson perspective is just the thing to enjoy the true charisma and plain nasty moves of Spiderman. Naturally he'll need all the skills his horrible accident blessed him with in order to make right the things that are wrong. The Amazing (or is it Incredible?) Spiderman is able to cast webs from his wrists for all manner of uses. He can swing from wall to ledge on a wad of web; he can use the stuff as a projectile weapon or even as a shield. The stickiness also allows our Spider hero to climb walls.

Lucky for Peter Parker that he can do all of these miraculous things, since in spandex couture he'll have to face a parade of his nastiest and toughest opponents. The plot begins when an imposter Spiderman has stolen some technology from Dr. Ottavious, an event to which the entire world bears witness, including Peter Parker himself ("Hey, that's not me!"). Old enemies circle as Spiderman jumps into action once more to

give himself a good seeing to... oh dear. Count amongst his enemies, J. Jonah Jameson the boss of the *Daily Bugle*, Scorpion and of course, his arch-nemesis, Venom. The stunning Black Cat also makes an appearance.

Comic capers

Spiderman promises furious high-speed, comic book action with frenzied duels and amazing aerial acrobatics. As you might expect in this style of action game, there are hidden characters to unlock and easter eggs galore. Games are incestuous so perhaps *Tony Hawk* will even make a secret guest appearance, just as Spiderman did in *Pro Skater 2*.

According to the man himself, With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility - so take responsibility for once and check out Spiderman come September.

John Dewhurst

WHY SPIDERMAN DEMANDS A SECOND LOOK...

■ Strong port pedigree

■ 3D comic style action

■ Swinging between skyscrapers

■ Spidey out of that awful Marvel v. Capcom game

Battlefield 1942

THE FIRST CASUALTY OF WAR IS ORIGINALITY

DETAILS

DEVELOPER
Digital Illusions

PUBLISHER
Electronic Arts

AVAILABLE
1st Qtr 2002

URL
www.dice.se



Two army dudes compare the size of their... weapons





Fed up with being a foot soldier? Hop in a plane instead!

With the public truly lapping up feature films such as *Saving Private Ryan* and *Pearl Harbor* (American's can't spell, can they?), game developers again look to celebrate the single greatest event in human history - World War II.

WWII was an event last century where a bunch of American actors got together, singlehandedly saved the world and then spent the next fifty years flag-waving and running a puppet show called the UN. According to these historically accurate films which will soon replace textbooks in schools, Tom Hanks won WWII by looking confused. Also the Japanese and Americans each killed thousands of people, but neither really meant to offend one another, so it seems.

Cross-cultural

Well if America can't get it right maybe Canada and Sweden can. *Battlefield 1942* is a rollicking ride through World War II courtesy of cross-cultural developer Digital Illusions. Like *Operation Flashpoint*, this game looks to inject some realism into war games. Digital Illusions is very conscious of making this

game high-octane action as well as blood-soaked in rhetoric.

This is the plan: a firstperson shooter with a variety of classes, including medics, soldiers, scouts, pilots, engineers and marines, and a major emphasis on combined forces: that means lots of vehicles. Using a general FPS control scheme and a cooperative team style, *Battlefield 1942* looks to sit somewhere between *Team Fortress* and *Medal of Honor*.

Rush or sneak

The vehicles will not be simple transport options but unique combat choices for their defensive and movement capabilities. The game calls for great interaction between troops of all kinds, so combining vehicles with foot soldiers and support units will be pivotal to combat success. Land, air and sea vehicles will all be available; from mighty bombers flying over the Pacific to tanks in North Africa, as well as battleships, APCs and many more. Piloting an aircraft supporting a tank rush or sneaking behind enemy lines are but two of the intriguing possibilities presented in *Battlefield 1942*.

In true war game style, you begin as a grunt and slowly move up the ranks by your skill, strong character, good conduct and killing the various enemies of the Allies. Through specialisation, each character can become more skilful, thus proving more of a threat to less experienced players.

Hey Gramps

Game environments include North Africa, the Pacific, Western and Eastern Europe. In a boost for realism (but perhaps a dip for good taste), sixteen of the most gruesome and infamous battles will be recreated in great detail so that those Nazis can feel the pain again - or maybe not whip the Allied arse as convincingly. Grandpa want a go? No, didn't think so...

It's true that America may have a monopoly on rewriting history, but anyone can have a crack at a war game. Can these Swedish Canadians do anything half-decent with a most terrible chapter in human history? You need wait only until Christmas. And after all, those Nazis really do deserve to die over and over again, don't they?

John Dewhurst

WHY BATTLEFIELD 1942 DEMANDS A SECOND LOOK...



■ These screenshots are something else...

■ I want to fly, no I want to shoot, no I want to drive...

■ More military realism which you love

■ There's no Tom Hanks

Spotlight

NEWS FROM ALL QUARTERS OF THE GLOBE

Quake DeatchMatch Revisited

"NEW" HALF-LIFE MOD AND NO SEQUELS IN SIGHT



Check out
Deathmatch Classic
on the covedisc!

A forthcoming mod release for Half-Life is DeathMatch Classic (DMC), a recreation of the original Quake deathmatch. Many gamers say it is the definitive deathmatch experience bar none - reviving the frenetic pace of the original Quake on the hugely popular Half-Life is the ultimate goal. Originally completed in-house, Valve has been granted permission by id Software to release DMC to the public. This is due solely to Valve's unique licensing agreement with id. Half-Life DMC features all of the original weapons, power-ups and armour that Quake Deathmatch boasted together with some classic maps such as DM4 and DM6. Current Half-Life models can be used in the game and while the classic lightning-fast Quake gameplay returns, the visuals have

been fully updated. That means textures, shadows and lighting effects have all been redone.

Gabe Newell, managing director of Valve Software explained the motivation behind releasing DeathMatch Classic for Half-Life: "Many people at Valve cut their teeth on the original Quake deathmatch. It is still better than almost all of the new multiplayer games released."

This is Valve's justification for reproducing an old experience that is still available to many gamers.

Resting on laurels

The response from Half-Life fans has been far less enthusiastic than the publicity. Not only have some found it an insult to their venerable Half-Life but the motivation for

such a mod is questionable. Rumblings in the games industry is that Valve is resting on its laurels due to the amazing success of Half-Life.

Critics state that Valve will not make genuine sequels while there is still so much interest due largely to Counter-Strike and the mod community. Team Fortress 2 and Half-Life 2 are still non-existent on release schedules and many fans are sceptical about a product such as this, which took a mere three months to complete.

DeathMatch Classic is available as part of the Half Life update 1.1.0.7.

Update 1.1.0.8 offers some genuine improvements to the ageing Half-Life, including integrated voice communication and multicast spectator capabilities. Both are available now.

ION Storm use Unreal once more

MAKERS OF DEUS EX TO USE EPIC GAMES' POWERFUL NEW ENGINE

ION Storm Austin has been granted a license to use Epic Games' next generation Unreal Engine in current and future titles. A mutually beneficial arrangement for both parties considering the critical success Deus Ex used an earlier version of Unreal Engine technology.

"Everyone at Epic is extremely proud of Deus Ex and the tremendous job the ION Storm team did in creating an innovative and deep gameplay experience using our technology," says Mark Rein, Vice President of Epic Games Inc. "We're excited that they're now developing games with our next generation Unreal Engine technology. ION Storm Austin represents the absolute highest standards in

game design and we're thrilled to play a role in their very exciting future."

"The decision to use the original Unreal Engine as the foundation for Deus Ex was one of the best decisions we made," states Warren Spector, project director on Deus Ex and Studio Director for ION Storm Austin. "Unreal, and the Unreal toolset, freed us to focus on design issues rather than technology which, given the response of public and press to the game, seems to have been a good thing! Looking ahead to future projects, the next generation Unreal Engine offers us even more power, even better tools and a multiplatform solution."

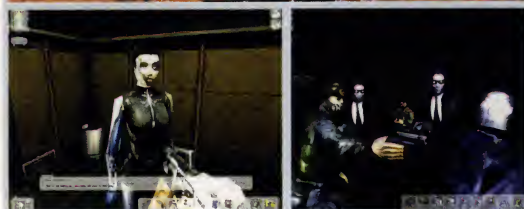
Features that the updated Unreal Engine offer developers of 3D software include a

hardware-accelerated, large-scale terrain system; hardware brushes for quickly creating scenes 100 to 200 times more detailed than current levels; and texture compression allowing for enormous, photorealistic textures up to 2048x2048.

"Unreal allowed the Deus Ex programmers to add in all the rich RPG features the team wanted in minimal time," states Harvey Smith, Lead Designer on Deus Ex and now a Project Director for ION Storm Austin. Highly anticipated titles such as Deus Ex 2 and Thief 3 will likely make use of this technology when all the backslapping between Mark, Warren and Harvey comes to an end.



Yay! Another excuse to print Deus Ex pics



Telstra limits Freedom Plan

Telstra BigPond has announced a three gigabyte download limit on ADSL and cable accounts under the Freedom Plan. According to the official Telstra email sent to all members, the new restrictions come as a result of because "around five percent of customers of users take up 35 percent of total bandwidth at any one time... [this] places a severe burden on the network which greatly reduces performance for most customers."

In an effort to clarify the situation, Telstra stated that the limit would have no negative effect the majority of users, in fact the limit would improve their service. "The three GB allowance per month represents something

like 600 MP3 songs (average 5Mb per song) or 300 two to three minute MPEG videos a month. Gamers should be able to enjoy up to 300 hours a month of broadband multi-user gaming." BigPond's Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) will be changed to offer users one of two options: Capping means that once the 3GB limit is reached, customers will only have access to email and telstra.com. Or users can elect to be charged for additional usage over the limit. The rate is said to be 35c per MB, which equals an additional \$350 per GB. Telstra promises effective communication of usage with customers, so that they clearly know how close they are to the limit. As Telstra admits, the lack of clarity in the

AUP is the cause of contention. The BigPond community has responded with concerted discontent. An online petition against the download limit numbers over 7000 signatures at time of publication. The Telstra BigPond AUP will undergo further changes in the near future to "provide greater clarity across a number of separate issues."



CORRECTION

PCPP#61 contained a review of the Videologic DigiTheatre DTS speaker system. There was an error in this review. The subwoofer was stated as being made of plywood; the unit is in fact made of higher-quality MDF. We apologise for this error.

New Control from Thrustmaster

Thrustmaster has some unique new peripherals soon to hit the market.

The HOMAB is an ergonomically designed gaming keyboard and mouse that concentrates on the unique needs of a gaming PC. With 7 thumb keys, 9 quick action keys, 22 advanced features keys, 3 adjustable zones (thumb, wrist pad, top keys) and Chatterbox, for voice integration in games, the HOMAB should be a serious option for the games elite.

The HOTAS Cougar high grade flight simulator controller is a replica of the US Air Force F-16 controller. Comprising a stick and

throttle, the HOTAS Cougar aims to be the best flight control unit yet. The unit features 28 buttons and multiple hat switches (all programmable), 5 to 10 axes, adjustable throttle resistance, adjustable afterburner, idle detent and 18 pound springs. Foxy programming software and 16k of internal memory will ensure easy customisation and long-term compatibility. Both are USB devices. The HOTAS is available now, while the HOMAB will be released October 2001.



Massive Multiplayer Teething Problems

REVOLUTIONARY 3D EPICS LIMP ONLINE

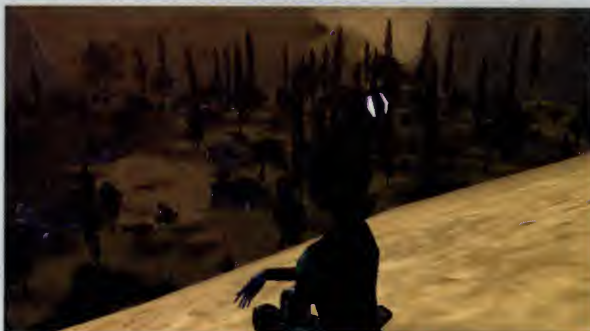
WWII Online: Blitzkrieg and Anarchy Online are two high-profile casualties of their own release schedules. Both of these ambitious titles have experienced serious problems since release. So intrusive are the inherent flaws that Strategy First and Funcom have been forced to waive fees for online play.

WWII Online is the massively multiplayer online recreation of the Battle for France. The game was released in the US on June 6, a time when neither developer Cornered Rat nor beta testers believed it to be ready. The promised features of the game are revolutionary. WWII Online will feature the largest online landscape yet, made up of three and a half million square kilometres of terrain. Firstperson battle with more than 50 vehicles to use and 3D modelling for individual players and vehicles promises supreme realism in battle.

At the time of publication, many WWII Online features are still missing. The strategic layer where high-ranking players can plan and carry out battles, the RPG style system of gaining experience, as well as sea battle are all yet to be implemented.

The problems that Funcom's massively online RPG Anarchy Online is experiencing concern users rather than features. They include game crashes and slow patching. Some users have received multiple CD-key registration confirmations and so possible overcharging is also causing disquiet. Upgrade patches have now been split into .exe files to allow for easier download. Of most concern though, is the security of registration connections, which should now been addressed. Funcom promises continued support of Anarchy Online, after the current run of problems have been resolved.

Sources within both companies acknowledge their products are incomplete. Each stress the potential of their high-profile games. Continued conjecture between developers and online players amounts to almost a dialogue - unheard of in games development. When the games are "complete", monthly fees and billing will begin. The industry-wide problems of release schedule and short development periods are alive and well. We will bring you reviews of both titles next issue.



Characters from World War II Online (right) and Anarchy Online (above) sit idle as developers race against time to fix the immense server problems



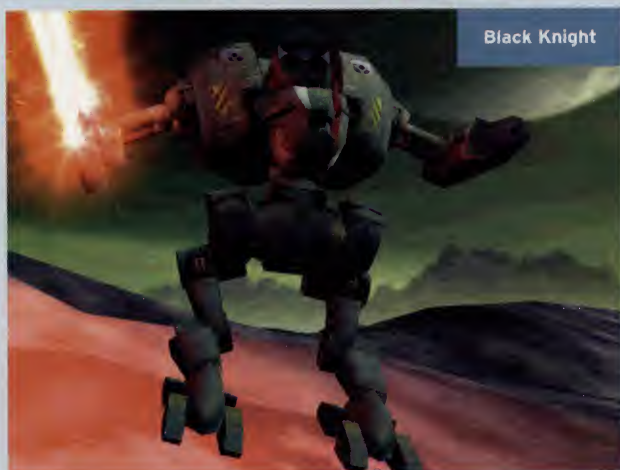
set to 75 degrees
set to 90 degrees
set to 15 degrees

Extra!

ADD-ONS, EXPANSIONS, UPDATES

MechWarrior 4: Vengeance will receive an expansion pack in the form of **MechWarrior 4: Black Knight**. This add-on comprises a new singleplayer campaign as a Black Legion mercenary for House Steiner, new Mechs, vehicles and of course, new multiplayer modes such as Strongholds, Absolute Attrition and Giant Killers. Of most interest is the new Black Market mode, which allows greater opportunities to upgrade Mechs by trading for sought-after equipment on the sly. A late third quarter release means fans won't have to wait long.

Asheron's Call: Dark Majesty is the first expansion pack for the popular online title. The pack boasts the original game, one free month's play, as well as expanded features such as housing and storage. Further, Dark Majesty is the next chapter in the Asheron's Call saga, introducing the island of Marae Lassal. This new area is stacked with new quests, dungeons and treasures - available to all levels of players who own the expansion pack.



Dark Majesty



All-Seeing Eye Arrives

The latest server browser is finally here, following some two years in development. The All-Seeing Eye browses for servers for your favourite on-line games, including Quake series, Tribes 2, Serious Sam and Unreal Tournament. Features that the Eye boasts include: filtering of servers based on geographical location without having to ping them; a buddy tracker handled by a dedicated server, so that your list is continuously updated; automatic updating; and data compression that cuts server refresh times significantly. The All-Seeing Eye is available for free shareware download from www.udpsfot.com/eye/index.htm.



deliverance
SOFTWARE

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www.deliverance.com.au

WINNERS

PCPP#61
MICROSOFT GAME OF
THE MONTH
I Bohm, Bulli NSW

ENGAGE!
K Wolff, Colyton NSW
J Fell, East Keilor VIC
WG Bowyer, Noarlunga
Downs SA

PCPP#62
MICROSOFT GAME OF
THE MONTH
M Rendall, Duffy ACT

MYST 3
M Hitchens,
Parramatta NSW
E Owen, Banksia NSW
I Bohm, Bulli NSW
M Colgan, Biloela QLD
P Thomson, Mt
Riverview NSW

Why no Max Payne?

REMEDY ADOPTS COOLER-THAN-THOU ATTITUDE

Assuming everything goes according to plan, by the time you read this Max Payne will be available on the shelf of every games store in the country. If you were expecting to read a review of Max Payne in this issue, we apologise for the disappointment. But, believe us when we say we're as disappointed as you are.

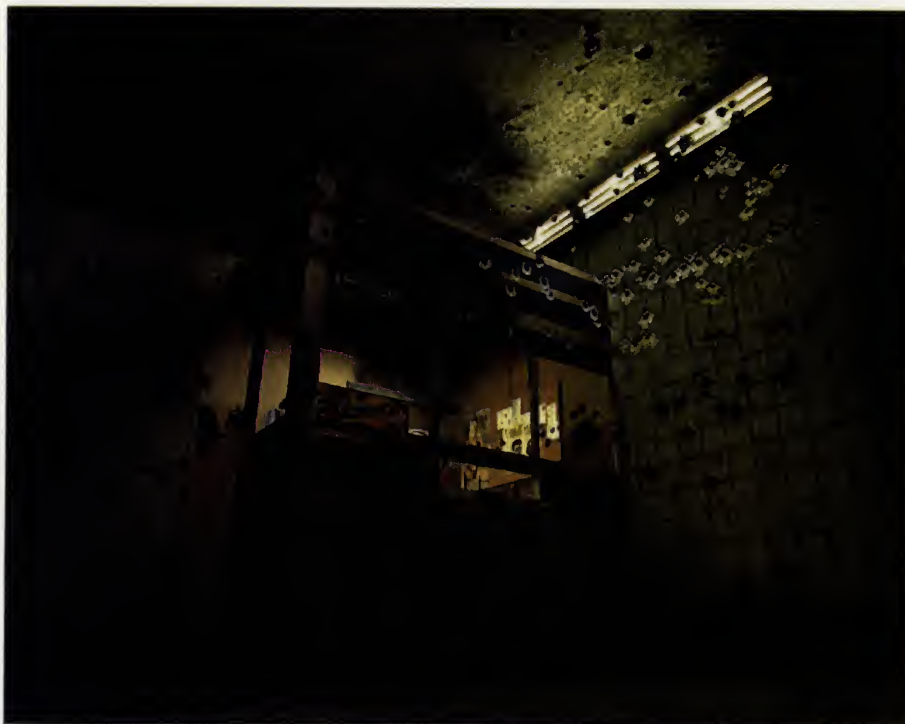
After years of waiting for the game to be released, and many months of us calling publisher Take 2 Interactive for any news, we were eventually told that no review code would be made available to the

worldwide press. Magazines would simply have to wait for a boxed copy just like everyone else. Thanks to publishing deadlines, this means that any genuine review will inevitably not be available until up to four weeks after the game has gone on sale. But this is obviously of little use to the thousands of gamers around the country.

So why has Remedy and Take 2 made this decision? Piracy is perhaps a concern, given the level of anticipation surrounding the title, but there are other security measures that could have been taken, such as those used by every other

publisher and distributor in the world on a regular basis. Another explanation is that the game itself is - and let's whisper it - not very good, and so sales could be severely hurt by early negative reviews. But this probably isn't true either, at least to judge from its impressive performance at E3. (Then again, it's impossible to tell considering no one has been given review code.)

It's all a bit of a mystery really. Next issue will definitely carry a review of Max Payne (written by Duke Nukem?), and we're as keen as you are to discover what all the secrecy is about.



Matrox Millennium G550

NEXT GEN CARD FOR INTERNET VIDEO COMMUNICATION

The next generation Matrox graphics card has been announced. The Millennium G550 is a fully featured card that boasts Matrox's new HeadCasting engine which makes use of Microsoft's DirectX 8 Vertex Shader to accelerate high-resolution facial animations across low-bandwidth internet connections.

The AGP 4X card boasts 32MB of DDR memory, supports single pass trilinear and anisotropic filtering. The 360MHz RAMDAC can render resolutions up to 2048x1536 of 2D images and the 3D accelerator can render two dual-textured pixels per clock.

The G550 builds on Matrox's impressive history of innovation with Environment Mapped Bump Mapping and dual monitor capabilities and features multi-display support of Windows 2000 and updated DualHead features. As part of the DualHead display features, the card has one integrated DVI-I output and one HD-15 output with adaptors to convert the DVI to HD-15 and the HD-15 to S-video or composite.

Release date is set as third quarter of 2001 and the card will be available with software that complements its feature set such as Matrox HeadCasting Edition by LIPSinc and Virtual Presenter for PowerPoint.

Confidential

CROSS YOUR HEART AND HOPE TO DIE...

Rumours suggest that John Romero's ION Storm Dallas will be closed by Eidos once Anachronox is shipped. The poor reception of Daikatana and low expectation for Anachronox seem to be the main motivation. Although disputed by various sources, the consensus now seems to be a "when" rather than an "if". Full steam ahead for ION Storm Austin, however...

One rumour currently doing the rounds is that Ensemble Studios is not only working on Age of Empires 2 follow-up, Age of Mythology, but a genuine Age of Empires 3. Ensemble representatives have been quick to deny, suggesting that it's simply a matter of confusion surrounding the RTS III codename given Age of Mythology during early development. Quite how that explains the presence of posters declaring Age of Empires III we saw pinned to office doors during a recent trip to Microsoft HQ, we're not sure...

Win!

THE WAY TO
DESTRUCTION

There are far too many across this wide land who have never donated a sleepless night to Diablo 2. Shame, shame. To remedy this national tragedy and to coincide with the release of Diablo 2: Lord of Destruction, PCPP has three prize packs to spread to the faithful and soon-to-be converted. Get it...?

Each thrill-stuffed pack contains Diablo 2, Diablo 2: Lord of Destruction, LoD t-shirt & poster. To win, simply answer the question on the back of an envelope and send it to the address below. Big thanks to Vivendi Universal Interactive Publishing Australia!

Q: NAME A FICTIONAL OR REAL INDIVIDUAL REPUTED TO HAVE SOLD THEIR SOUL TO THE DEVIL - AND WHAT THEY APPARENTLY GAINED FROM SAID EXCHANGE?

The way to Destruction

PC PowerPlay, 78 Renwick St, Redfern. NSW 2016



People will do
anything to get
Diablo 2



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At the time of placing this advert, Sudden Strike Forever was still to be classified.

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Mod Life

SPoonman's ROUNDUP OF ALL THE LATEST MOD NEWS



DEATHMATCH CLASSIC

For Half Life
Developer Valve
URL www.planethalflife.com
Release 1.0

Most people will already know about DMC, but for those who don't it's a Quake 1 conversion for Half-Life, basically it recreates everything from quake 1 inside the Half-Life engine. It seems a little redundant, but it's certainly still heaps of fun and brings back that old fragging feeling. But if you want to play Quake, why not play... Quake. One gets the impression this mod was created "Because we could".



GLOBAL WARFARE

For Half Life
Developer GW
URL www.planethalflife.com/globalwarfare
Release 2.0

Global Warfare breathes much needed life into a rather old idea. GW is a team based military simulation. Sound familiar? Well it probably ends there. Firstly there is choice of classes, which is very important. Some classes carry C4, some can call down airstrikes which are vital to completing some maps. One excellent idea is that the outcome of a previous map determines the next map played, which really gives it a "large scale" feel. An excellent mod if you like tanks, bombs and explosions. Face it. Who doesn't?



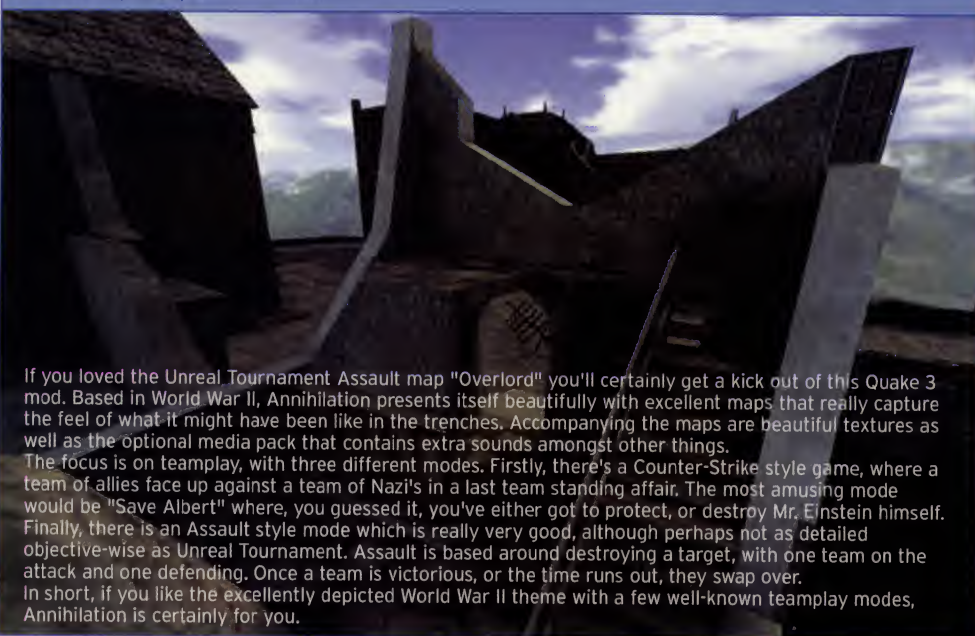
DEEZIRE

For Red Alert 2
Developer DeeZ
URL www.stafford71.freemove.co.uk/deezire9.htm
Release Version 6.0

DeeZire is the first mod we've reviewed for Red Alert 2 and hopefully won't be the last. It's a multiplayer mod which claims to unlock certain features created by Westwood and never used in the game such as new units, textures sounds and maps. It's certainly worth the download for the maps alone as well as the new units and graphics.

ANNIHILATION

For: Quake 3 Arena **Developer:** Team Annihilation
URL: www.planetquake.com/annihilation **Release:** Beta 1.01



If you loved the Unreal Tournament Assault map "Overlord" you'll certainly get a kick out of this Quake 3 mod. Based in World War II, Annihilation presents itself beautifully with excellent maps that really capture the feel of what it might have been like in the trenches. Accompanying the maps are beautiful textures as well as the optional media pack that contains extra sounds amongst other things. The focus is on teamplay, with three different modes. Firstly, there's a Counter-Strike style game, where a team of allies face up against a team of Nazi's in a last team standing affair. The most amusing mode would be "Save Albert" where, you guessed it, you've either got to protect, or destroy Mr. Einstein himself. Finally, there is an Assault style mode which is really very good, although perhaps not as detailed objective-wise as Unreal Tournament. Assault is based around destroying a target, with one team on the attack and one defending. Once a team is victorious, or the time runs out, they swap over. In short, if you like the excellently depicted World War II theme with a few well-known teamplay modes, Annihilation is certainly for you.

SPOONMAN'S LAN DIARY

VERSUSWORTH

Location: Cairns QLD
Date: Monthly three-day LAN
Players: up to 120
Price: \$25 (\$20 for members)
URL: www.versusworth.com
 VersusWorth aims to be the biggest LAN in Cairns and seem to be well on the way to achieving that. They have a number of innovative features and are one of the few LANs around Australia that stretch for more than two days. VersusWorth is particularly good if you bring your friends along. For every new person you refer you get \$3 of the price of the next LAN, so you could be enjoying a three day LAN for as little as \$4. Price does not include food.

LANDAG

Location: Sydney NSW (Cranebrook)
Dates: 25/8/01 (24 hours)
Players: 50+
Cost: \$20
URL: www.dag.net.au
 LandAG is a twenty four hour LAN run every month. It runs from 10am on Saturday right through until 10am on Sunday. You will need some extra cash for drinks and chips on sale but food appears to be provided. The requirements are the same as usual LANs, except they do ask you don't bring a monitor larger than 19-inch as table sizes might restrict the number of players able to attend.

ACTGN NERFEST

Location: Canberra ACT
Dates: 4/8/01 - 5/8/01
Players: 240
Cost: TBA
URL: www.thenerdfest.com
 Nerd Fest is one of the first AGL events, comprising part of the AusGamers league. Therefore this is an excellent opportunity if you live in Canberra to show your wares as a player and really mix it with some of the big guns of Australian Gaming. From the local aspect, Nerd Fest is quickly becoming the ACT's premier LAN event, with 240 players heading to the Blood Bath every month. If you live in the ACT this is certainly the LAN to go to.

For submissions, email spoonman@next.com.au

EIDOS

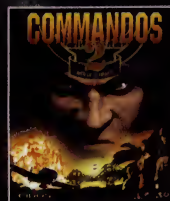
PC
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ROM
Yet to be
Classified

COMMANDOS

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IRRATIONAL GAMES AUSTRALIA ON...

FREEDOM FORCE

PART 4



AFTER DESIGNING THE BRILLIANT SYSTEM SHOCK 2, IRRATIONAL SET UP AN OFFICE IN CANBERRA. THIS IS THE TALE OF THE TEAM'S FIRST GAME...



Manbot subdues a couple of would-be car-jackers



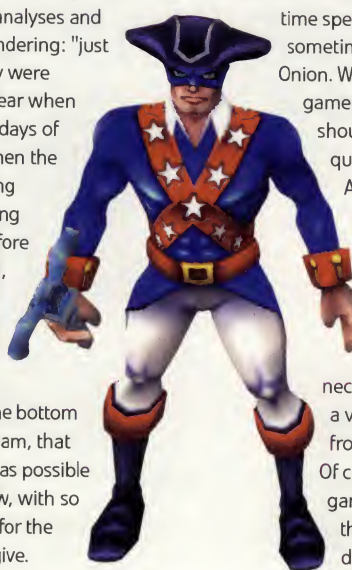
Welcome back to another instalment in the Freedom Force Developer Diary, the diary that let's you experience what it's like to be making the world's first 3D superhero team game! Since last time a lot more coffee has been drunk in the Irrational office, thousands more lines of code have been written, the towers of coke cans have got a bit higher and many new 3D models have been constructed. So inch by inch we claw our way towards the final product.

This is an interesting time on any game development

project: the time when publishers look up from their product matrices, market analyses and distribution plans and start wondering: "just where the hell is that game they were making?". It's also the time of year when E3 rolls around for another few days of craziness in Los Angeles and when the press and public start demanding playable demos, details on editing tools, how to mod the game before it is even out and so on. All in all, it's a busy and crazy time.

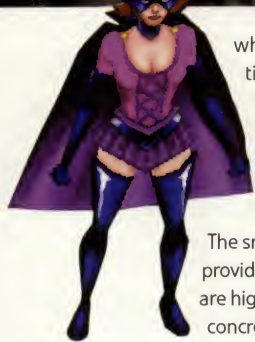
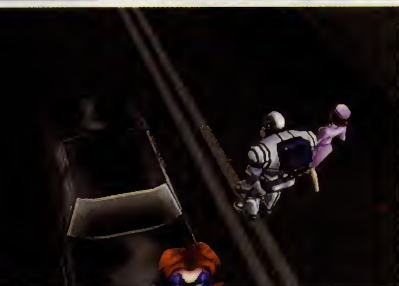
Feature freeze

But through all this it's very important to keep focused on the bottom line. And for the development team, that line is making the game as cool as possible and getting it done on time. Now, with so many competing requirements for the team's time, something has to give.



Sometimes that thing is the schedule, sometimes it is time spent chatting with the fans and sometimes it is time spent reading the Onion. What it often is though, is cutting game features - but the one thing it should never be is cutting back on the quality of the game.

And a very important realisation in game development is that cutting these features does not necessarily accord with cutting coolness. In fact, often the reverse applies. The critical and harsh thinking that it is necessary to apply at this stage is often a very useful tonic for removing flab from the game and making it playable. Of course, this may be hard to see in a game about superheroes - a game that is inherently about being able to do an incredible variety of things



whether those things are flying, travelling through time or making traffic lights turn green. But, it's our job as game designers to find the systems that are really important - make those work - and cut the rest of them.

Power parameters

The smartest way to do this is to focus on those features that provide maximum bang for the buck and eliminate those that are highly specific or just plain not worth having. Let's take a concrete example. In Freedom Force most of the superpowers fall into a basic set that we can classify as

melee, projectile, beam, direct or area. Each power in one of these areas is described through a large set of parameters. For example, a projectile might be described through its range, speed, damage amount, damage type, accuracy, explosive area of impact and so on.

Now, let's say we want to create a special power that freezes its target. The best way of doing this is if we can find some way of integrating this effect into the basic set of parameters for projectiles. Because not only does that allow us to create the freeze bullet we need, but it also opens up the range of things that you as a Freedom Force player (we hope) can do when you go to create your own custom powers.

So, all systems that feed into our general power description parameters are big bang for the buck. Parameters such as homing ability, chaining attacks, paralysis, stunning and on and on are all solidly entrenched as useful features. The more superpowers we can roll into this system the better. And the ones that just won't fit have to be looked with a critical eye to see if they are really worth having.

But then of course, there are always the bizarre powers that just won't fit into these systems. Like being able to change from one form to another. Or being able to teleport. Or burrowing into the ground... And we just have to have those.

So I guess we'll be staying up late. The things we do for you!

Jon Chey,
Managing Director, IGA

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DVDA

WITH JAMES COTTEE

NEON GENESIS EVANGELION VOL 4

This disc brings us into the second half of the series, where the action gradually gives way to fruity psycho-trauma. Ep. 12 sees Nerv confronted by a giant Kinder Surprise monster that attacks from outer space. Ep. 13 is the haxor episode, with the battle of warez supplanting the usual giant robot conflict. Finally, we have the requisite catch-up episode, with a surprise revelation or two to boot. Make no mistake, this is the best anime money can buy.


SCORE 

BUBBLEGUM CRISIS 2040 VOL. 3

Whether it's the rebellious Priss, the poncy Sylia, the sporty Linna or the adorable Nene, everyone has a favourite among the babes of BGC. This disc sees their struggle against the ruthless Genom corporation extend to the abandoned sewers of old Tokyo, where a giant trilobite eats boomers



for breakfast. Far more disturbing is a trip to the countryside in which Linna's parents try to marry her off! It's anime, now with family values!

SCORE 


WICKED CITY

Madman, R

Directed by Yoshiaki Kawajiri, the same guy who did Ninja Scroll, this contemporary thriller shares much with everybody's favourite samurai slasher flick. There's a twisted, lecherous old midget who makes no end of trouble for the dashing leads, spies from different worlds destined to



shag, and an army of hideous mutant assassins in turn assails all three of them. This is a special edition disc, remastered in full 5.1 with full language options.

SCORE 

THE FLY

20th Century Fox, R

David Cronenberg's got a real thing for meat. Whether pondering the deeper significance of ESP, TV addiction or videogames, the answer is always meat, meat, MEAT! His remake of the old 50s sci-fi classic mutates Jeff Goldblum's genetic code with that of a common house fly,



creating a hideous hybrid of insect and nerd! Co-starring Geena Davis as the shrieking maiden, eXistenZ fans will get a real buzz out of this one!

SCORE 

NEWSFRONT

Roadshow, PG

This dramatisation of the exploits of Australia's early newsreel cameramen has a lot to answer for. By stunning audiences worldwide and scooping up international awards, it has given the Australian film industry an obsession with creating high quality epic dramas, sculpting the local movie



scene for decades hence. The feature has been fully restored for this disc, which is packed to its dual layer gills with documentary material.

SCORE 

THUNDERBIRDS ARE GO

20th Century Fox, G

The first Thunderbirds movie, which sees a manned mission to Mars interrupted by rock-like serpent monsters, and Alan Tracy's dream sequences interrupted by Cliff Richard and The Shadows. Perhaps the greatest technical achievement of this film is that every shot is set up so the puppets aren't



actually seen walking anywhere. The Tracy boys don't see much action, leaving the bulk of their counter-terrorist actions in Lady Penelope's capable wooden hands.

SCORE 


THUNDERBIRD 6

20th Century Fox, G

Sylvia Anderson produced both the Thunderbirds movies, and this one surpasses the first in terms of simplicity, absurdity, and insanely kitsch set design. Brains builds an anti-gravity airship, a ponderous white elephant that carts the cast around the globe in a plot that's painfully slow, even for a



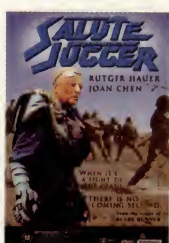
children's movie. It's quite surreal, actually. This is only for the Thunderbirds completist, or anyone obsessed with obscure 60s cult apocrypha.

SCORE 


THE SALUTE OF THE JUGGER

Infogrames, M

Rutger Hauer and Joan Chen star in a depiction of a nightmare future where washed up actors fight to the death for scraps of food in the ruins of Cooper Pedy, and as such the film is chillingly realistic. Equal parts Rollerball and Mad Max, and shot entirely in Australia, Salute of the Juggler is both



written and directed by David Peoples. Sexy, surreal, and very, very stupid, this may not be art, but it is genius.

SCORE 

DRAGONBALL Z

Madman, M

This show was made for kids, but it's possible for adults with juvenile mindsets to enjoy it too. If you've managed to miss the thousands of hours of DBZ Channel 10 have been churning out, every episode revolves around spikey haired martial arts aliens who fly around obsessing about increasing their



"power." The voice acting and sound editing on all these discs is phenomenal, but the original material doesn't warrant such lavish attention.

SCORE 



AN INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION IN A WORLD of MAGIC

Danger awaits, hardy traveler, in the turbulent lands of Arcanum! Prepare potion or pistol, for armament is a must! Encounter more than 500 friends and fiends of the oddest sort on dozens of quests and campaigns. Travel alone through this massive realm,

or invite companions to join you online. And for those with discriminating taste, we sport the most advanced role-playing system ever created in this or any other reality.

APPLEBY STEAM 1200

GRIMOIRE & GASLIGHT

Discover the mysteries of magic and technology! Delve into dark caverns or prowl the squalid city streets to unearth the secrets of this tortured age.



Choose dueling or discourse to carry the day in this epic tale. Many means exist to solve the dozens of quests found throughout this massive land.



Rewards await heroes and villains of hardy caliber and constitution! Earn Fate Points and enhance your Reputation among the denizens of Arcanum.



Create your own online campaigns with the Arcanum World Editor, a robust tool designed for the common folk.



ARCANUM™

www.arcanum1.com



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Coming soon

AUGUST 2001

Arcanum (Vivendi)
Kohan (Ubisoft)
MechCommander 2 (Microsoft)
Sub 2000 (Electronic Arts)
Super Bombad Racing (Electronic Arts)
Throne of Darkness (Vivendi)

SEPTEMBER 2001

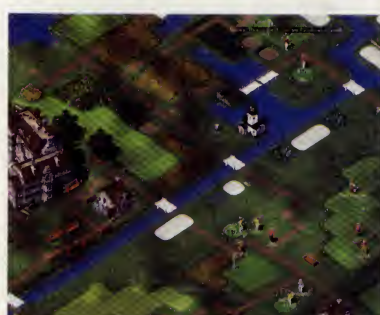
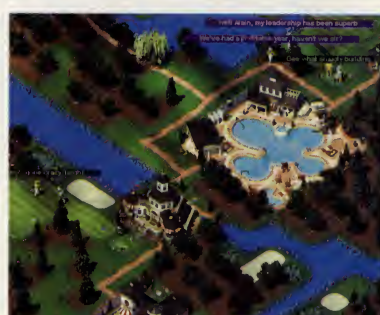
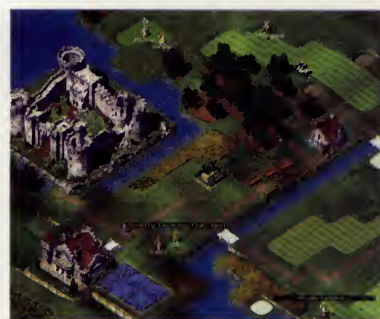
Alex Ferguson's Player Manager (Take 2 Interactive)
Commandos 2 (Ozisoft)
Conquest (Ubisoft)
Flight Sim 2002 (Microsoft)
Motor City Online (Electronic Arts)
Project Eden (Ozisoft)
Red Faction (THQ)
Sid Meier's Sim Golf (Electronic Arts)
Silent Hunter 2 (Ubisoft)
Spiderman (Activision)
Star Trek: Bridge Commander (Activision)
Zoo Tycoon (Microsoft)

OCTOBER 2001

C&C Renegade (Electronic Arts)
Duke Nukem Forever (Take 2 Interactive)
Dungeon Siege (Microsoft)
Evil Twin (Ubisoft)
IL-2 Sturmovik (Ubisoft)
Mafia (Take 2 Interactive)
Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault (Electronic Arts)
Myth 3 (Take 2 Interactive)
Pool of Radiance (Ubisoft)
Stronghold (Take 2 Interactive)

NOVEMBER 2001

Battle Realms (Ubisoft)
Civilization 3 (Ozisoft)
Harry Potter (Electronic Arts)
Empire Earth (Vivendi)
Incoming Forces (Interplay)
Neverwinter Nights (Interplay)
State of Emergency (Take 2 Interactive)
Torn (Interplay)



Australia's most wanted

If this month's response proves anything at all, it's that everyone still loves Star Wars. The chance to 'be' Boba Fett - or at least someone cast in his mould - is apparently irresistible to a good portion of the PCPP readership. Galaxies can only look good at this stage, we suppose, as Verant hasn't really revealed terribly much about how it will play. It remains idealised in the minds of fans, so of course it's going to be a great game.

Further up the chart, Red Faction was finally deposed in a proletarian uprising by Return to Castle Wolfenstein. There are now no fewer than five firstperson shooters occupying the chart - a clear indication of what the most popular genre is this year. Perhaps the recent batch of mediocre realtime strategy titles has left a sour taste in the mouth. The brilliant-looking Empire Earth should be just the tonic for that, though.

This month's winner is T. Michaels of Peakhurst, NSW. A copy of Medal of Honor will be storming your letterbox around October. Send your top five most wanted games to: wanted@pcpowerplay.com.au



- 1 Return to Castle Wolfenstein
- 2 Red Faction
- 3 Star Wars Galaxies
- 4 Neverwinter Nights
- 5 Duke Nukem Forever
- 6 Empire Earth
- 7 Medal of Honor
- 8 Doom 3
- 9 Commandos 2
- 10 Pool of Radiance

dr claw

hello it is i dr claw your preferred internet representative and champion of all newbies everywhere who get hax0rzed because they are newbies which is no reason to hax0rz someone at all

and who waited all night on their modem connection to download the new deathmatch classic mod for half life and then found out it was just for half life? it is totally lame, it is only the levels from quake which i already have and i got quake in 1996 now here we are again with those same levels in half life. i guess it is good though because now if i want to play quake dm or if i want to play half life dm i can just use the same cd and if i get the no cd crack i don't have to use any cd which is pretty 133+ if you ask me. but i still think the guys who are making half life 2 should hurry up and make half life 2 and not make more dm maps for half life 1 because that is lame and i want half life 2 now.

anyway we are all talking about this on the pcpp forums which are at www.pcppowerplay.com.au and that's the place you can go if you want to talk to me and sometimes even the pcpp d00dz who come on and post that i am 133+

also don't forget to go to the ofical IRC channel it is #pcpp on irc.austnet.org but you will need to download mIRC if you want to go there and talk to me and PCPP_dude and Worms and Timie1010 and maybe Prolifix unless he is still banned because he called anthony a nazi.

but until next month that is all i have to say except that the tomb raider movie ROXORZI lucy is out and angelina is in is all i can say so goodbye to you!



Our most wanted



DAVID EMPIRE EARTH
This is the game to drag the RTS genre out of its recession



ANTHONY RED FACTION
It's Mars-tastic!



JOHN ALIENS vs PREDATOR 2
I want to be Hudson



JAMES MASTER OF ORION 3
It won't be as good as Star Control though

Games Chart

THE BEST SELLERS THIS MONTH

inform

The Official Australian
PC Games Chart

Compiled by Inform in association with AVSDA

W/E June 17, 2001

Top 20 Best Selling Full Price PC Games

(>\$29.95 inc. GST)

Position	Game Title	Game Type
1	Emperor Battle For Dune	Strategy
2	The Sims	Strategy
3	Myst III: Exile	Adventure
4	The Sims Collector's Ed	Strategy
5	The Sims House Party	Strategy
6	The Sims Livin' Large	Strategy
7	Sim City 3000 Unlimited	Strategy
8	Sim Mania Pack	Strategy
9	Diablo II	RPG
10	Black & White	Strategy
11	Half Life Platinum	Action
12	Sim Mania For Kids	Strategy
13	Cossacks: European Wars	Strategy
14	Sudden Strike	Strategy
15	Age of Emp: Collector's Ed	Strategy
16	Age Of Empires 2	Strategy
17	Icewind Dale	RPG
18	Age of Emp. 2: Conqueror's Exp	Strategy
19	Quake 3 Arena	Action
20	Half Life Counter Strike	Action

A V S D A
Australian Visual Software Distributors Association Ltd

★ New entry
↔ Non-mover
↑ Up from last week
↓ Down from last week

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HP10

Are Games as good as they used to be?

TODAY GAMERS ARE SPOILT FOR CHOICE, BUT ARE WE BETTER OFF? ARE GAMES A VICTIM OF THEIR OWN SUCCESS? THE PC POWERPLAY CREW PEERS INTO THE DEEP, DISTANT PAST TO FIND OUT...

Moderator : John Dewhurst

Panel : Anthony Fordham, Edward Fox, David Wildgoose, James Cottee



John Dewhurst: Straight to the point, are games as good as they used to be?

James Cottee: Well, games are stored as a digital medium. As a result the old ones are exactly the same as they used to be. If the new ones that come out are worse, you can just go back and play the old ones.

David Wildgoose: ...Yes.

JD: It's hard to judge because the games that are made today are vastly different to any of the games that we played before.

Anthony Fordham: But, are they?

Ed Fox: We didn't have anything like online gaming ten years ago. A good proportion of the market today didn't exist then.

AF: There were shooters.

DW: What kind of shooters? Are we talking about Space Invaders?

AF: Well, yes.

EF: Are we as excited about games today?

DW: When you are younger, games were a newer thing, they still had that novelty about them. But I definitely

with graphics than game design.

AF: The weird thing about 3D games is that they're good sellers but they're never best-sellers. Some buy these games so that their \$6000 beast PC does something impressive. The motivation for them is not just about gameplay.

JC: Because PC gamers are inherently nerds and have fewer friends, they feel desperate to impress them faster. At the extreme of end of the scale is [prominent Sydney games journalist] who had a housewarming party...

[Slanderous anecdote follows]

EF: PC architecture is constantly evolving at a rapid pace, so developers are constantly chasing their own tails to add new pretty bells and whistles, which crash your computer, require new drivers and make you upset.

AF: I think that even though there are a lot of negatives that technology can bring to development, the good games today give you a lot more because of technology: the clever client-server based multiplayer, they give you the immersive worlds,

Rose-tinted specs

JD: What's the archetype of the good game from the past?

DW: I remember thinking Ultima IV & V were the most amazing games that I played in the late 80s. I have replayed them in recent years and they're just rubbish.

AF: I'm like that with Wing Commander as well.

JD: But I think about Sam n Max, Indiana Jones - they were amazing games. They're as good if not better today.

EF: Some games stand the test of time. But that style of game hasn't changed.

AF: What genres have evolved?

DW: Well, RPGs have become infinitely more sophisticated since then.

JC: I think older games stand up better if there's less flab. I can still play Wizball, it's got it where it counts.

EF: That's because it doesn't belong to a genre.

AF: Do we think games aren't as good as they used to be every time we encounter a genre piece that hasn't evolved at all? It's still just Wolfenstein 3D with OpenGL.

JC: We were moderately impressed by Serious Sam. It rekindled some spark of fun deep within us. Would we go back and play games in CGA if they weren't Alley Cat?

JD: Even if they were Alley Cat!

DW: If I could play a game as sophisticated as Planescape: Torment in CGA, yeah, I would.

AF: If someone gave you a random selection of games from the late 80s, early 90s, would there be more good games than in a random selection from today?

JC: The percentage of crap games is probably constant.

DW: The average gamer would be happy to pay for 25 or 30% of PC games today. We're better off than ten years ago.

Safer... better?

JD: Has gaming changed because it's

no longer a young industry?

EF: I think people are less likely to explore or get finance for crazy, wacky ideas for games. Which is shame.

AF: Sure it keeps us safe from "Moonshine Runners"...

DW: What a relief.

JC: I think games today are 2% better.

EF: What's your margin of error?

JC: 2%.

[laughs all round]

AF: The classic rule is the sequel to a movie is worse than the original. Is that true with games? I don't know that it is.

JC: I think Worms games have been getting better. Westwood games are getting better, at around .01%.

DW: On the whole, sequels are much better. Tribes 2 is a good example. Black & White was better than Populous.

EF: You don't get that simple arcade thing from giant production houses anymore.

DW: Isn't that what Quake III is?

EF: No, it's pretty involved gameplay and controls, whereas in Space Invaders anyone can step in and get a high score.

AF: Bloody hell, even I'm good at Space Tripper.

JC: A big problem is that there hasn't been a good Space War game since StarCon 2, that's almost a decade. Valid genres are dying out...

DW: Because they can't work out how to make them in 3D.

JC: Build it and they will come, I say.

JD: Thanks everybody.

fifteen years ago we could dismiss a crap game since it was one guy in his bedroom, but now that they cost millions, we expect more

think the quality of games is improving.

AF: Really?

DW: Without a doubt. The best games of last year were better than the best games released the year before.

AF: In your opinion...

DW: I expect there to be a game released this year that is better than Deus Ex.

AF: But is Deus Ex as good as it used to be?

Shiny things

JD: Is creating a 3D engine more important than making enjoyment?

DW: They're instantly impressive - it's far easier to impress people quickly

thousands of lines of dialogue and massive databases for dozens of side quests...

JC: As soon as a game design is down pat then technical innovations actually mean something.

EF: Do you think we feel more offended by crap games today than we used to.

JC: Yeah.

AF: I think I do.

DW: I think ten, fifteen years ago we could dismiss a crap game since it was one guy in his bedroom, but now that they cost however many million dollars, we expect more.

EF: We don't go back and play those old games often enough.

HAVE YOUR SAY

Join the debate in the PCPP Forum. Are PC games as good as they've ever been? Have developers lost the plot? Were classic games that good to begin with? Write in and let us know. We will publish the best responses in our new Forum page to follow each Roundtable discussion.

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PLATINUM PC

The **LETTER OF THE MONTH** writer wins a game from Ozisoft's Platinum range of titles. Available in Platinum this month are Deathtrap Dungeon, Tomb Raider, Outcast, Imperium Galactica 2, TA: Kingdoms, Wheel of Time, and Le Mans 24 Hours.

Letters Topic: We eagerly await feedback on the Top 100

Write to: PC PowerPlay Letters, 78 Renwick St, Redfern 2016 Email: letters@pcpowerplay.com.au

STILL GOING AHEAD

I would like to ask some questions.

1. Looking at recent issues I found the Readers' CD ad. Are you still going ahead with that?
2. When will Warcraft III come out?
3. For someone who is hoping to get into the games industry, what uni courses should I do?

Chris Broderick

1. Stay tuned for more news next issue.
2. Blizzard is officially saying the end of this year...
3. A general Computer Science or Mathematics degree is okay. There is also a growing number of more specialised courses focusing on games and games-related programming. Becoming involved in mod-making is another route.

WITH LONGBOW ARCHERS

Being a big fan of anything RTS, I read the article in PCPP#62 about Age Of Mythology with great interest. It says that Age Of Kings was just a game about getting the economy going the fastest. I agree with this, but how are they going to fix this in Age Of Mythology? Everyone's got that urge inside just to pump up their economy and then flood the enemy with longbow archers and champions, etc. I really don't see how they can prevent Age Of Mythology from becoming another game like this. Otherwise, the game looks excellent, the graphics are smoother, the units are better and it adds a little excitement with the gods being

BYTE SIZE

I was reading your feature on pen & paper RPGs (PCPP#61) and thought how cool it would be to have a P&P game of Fallout. Using the Fallout stats system, it would work!

Ska-core Nick

Try GURPS, which you can buy at any decent Games Workshop store.

introduced and mythological creatures.

Jarrad Garrick

Age of Mythology won't be out until next year, so before then we will definitely quiz Ensemble about your concerns.

MONKEYS IN IT

In your preview of Age of Mythology, Ensemble said that the game would include monkeys and that monkeys had not been in any other RTS games. I would just like to point out that Red Alert 2 has monkeys in it and they throw bananas that can kill you.

Andrew Campbell

It's official: Westwood were monkeys before Ensemble. But we knew that already.

VISIT GAME FORUMS

In my opinion games are once again approaching the old scenario of "been there, done that".

Games companies claim that they are listening to gamers. But hands up all those who have had a games company approach them personally and ask, "What game do you want next?"

If game developers were serious they would hold world forums/surveys via game magazines like PCPP, plus include a voting system for previous suggestions and ideas. If you visit game forums like PCPP's you will see many gamers have ideas for better games.

Why should we pay \$80 for a game that has limited creativity because the developer only has limited resources to invent new styles? We are the gamers and we know what we want.

ROM

It's obviously impractical for developers to contact gamers direct. And what you suggest already happens on message boards and forums dedicated to



many games. Developers do listen, but sometimes imposed financial considerations take priority.

FORMATS AND FILE TREES

I don't really get why people are dissing id Software so much, especially that Mr Pissed in PCPP#60.

Let's look at Quake3. It has a good engine, but was ruined by the lack of gameplay and options. That's why we have mods, and believe me, plenty of people get Quake3 only for mods. You might think that you can edit any old game, but Quake3's simplicity of file formats and file trees just make it so easy to get into.

Ever since the so-called disappointing release of Team Arena, suddenly everyone has something against id. It is a great development team and makes the most worthwhile games in the community. I reckon Doom 3 is gonna blow everyone away after seeing that movie on your coverdisc.

Edward Han

Sure, id's commitment to the mod community is admirable, but Team

BYTE SIZE

On p109 of PCPP#62, if you look at the left side of the picture of Z: Steel Soldiers you can see a couple of speakers. I'm not poking fun at the game, but isn't this game supposed to be a wargame not a turn-table-scratching fun game?

Steven Chesney

Arena was a disappointment. The new Doom tech looks promising, but let's wait until we see some gameplay...

NEARLY NOTHING GAME

I agree with the majority of your reviews, but I believe there are some unjusts in the way you review games. The most obvious unjust that springs to mind is the way reviewers are always looking for a game that will change the gaming industry permanently.

The problem is that there is nearly nothing game developers can do to improve the gaming industry. For example, the FPS is nearly out of possible improvements and the same

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- James Cameron

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goes for the RTS (just not to the same extent). All that is improving is the visuals and the type of computer that the game requires to run smoothly. It is my understanding that you have too high a standard.

Justin Pickering

Call us crazy, but the PCPP crew doesn't want to play the same game over and over. Emperor only received 79% (still a commendable score, by the way) because it's essentially the same game as every other Westwood RTS. If you already own Dune 2000, why buy Emperor when you can play Dune 2000 again - for free! Our 90% scores are reserved for those games that offer gamers a new experience. It doesn't have to be a whole new game, just one with a few compelling, original aspects.

CRUEL JOKE

What's this about Deus Ex was being ported to the PS2 to help dwindling games (and console) sales? Is this some kind of cruel joke? This is absolute crap. Ion Storm is going on about improving the graphics of the characters and game world; the graphics were nice enough as it was, although not stunning. Now the PS2 is trying to top this with its higher processing power. Let's hope the project is canned sometime soon.

Ben Hamilton

Why should PS2 owners be denied the joys of Deus Ex? From what we saw at E3, the necessarily streamlined interface of the PS2 version is something we'd like to see implemented for Deus Ex 2 on PC. The improved character animation was great, too.

BYTE SIZE

I was reading through PCPP#61 and saw that Tim Schafer has a new company called Double Fine. What games are they making? Please say graphic adventures.

Ceydn Boxall

Tim wouldn't tell us what he was working on specifically, but did let slip that several former LucasArts colleagues had joined him at the Microsoft-owned Double Fine. Let's hope he's not only making an adventure game, but that it's coming to PC as well as Xbox.

KNOW AND LOVE

Do you realize how many of the good games that have been announced for the PC are headed to the Xbox. First Halo and now Deus Ex 2 and Thief 3. This is indeed a terrible thing for the PC Games industry. It was PC gamers that made Thief the success that it was, it was PC gamers that made Deus Ex the success that it was, and now Microsoft - that bastion of quality software that we all know and love - is not just happy with its part of the pie, it wants the whole pie. I don't know about you guys but it pisses me off.

Charles Bryant

Don't fret about DX2 and Thief3. We spoke to Ion Storm's Harvey Smith at E3 shortly after this story broke. He reassured us that, while it's true Ion Storm is developing both games on a console, they're also in simultaneous development for PC. The technology they're working with is stunning. Prepare to be seriously impressed when the games are publicly unveiled.

STRUCK AN EMOTIONAL

In your review of Crime Cities (PCPP#61) you said, "It's been twelve years since someone did a good version of Car Wars". Seeing this comment suddenly struck an emotional chord when I remembered one of the first games I bought. Gametek released it in 1994 and I still regard it as one of the best games ever. Its name was Quarantine and it was about a taxi driver in the future in a city where a virus in the water system had turned everyone into zombies.

Blake Nield

It also starred the lead singer from Ratcat.

EXTREMELY DISAPPOINTED

Is Motor City Online an online game only? Will it be a crappy, arcade singleplayer game offline with the guts and fun of the game only online? I'm really looking forward to its release after the last effort, Porsche Challenge. I will be extremely disappointed to find I need a cable modem to play the bulk of the game. Do you know if singleplayer mode lets you play the whole game?

Darren

Bad news. Motor City will be online only, with a small portion of the game playable offline. And unless EA launches local servers, then unfortunately you will need a cable modem.

COULD PRODUCE SOMETHING

Oh my goodness! You have got to check out the Starwars Galaxies! It is simply the best thing I have ever seen in my entire life! Seriously, I can't believe that a group of the most talented designers could produce something so wonderful, so flashy, so... oooh, it's too good to be true... Have you seen the screens? It's not just fancy rendered images it's actual gameplay! They're simply amazing. The technological advances in mankind have simply awaited this moment from the beginning of time... (Snip! - Ed)

Cameron Mallett

"Actual gameplay", eh? Even Verant would admit there is no gameplay to Galaxies at this stage, just a wishlist design document. The demo shown at E3 was merely a display of graphics technology, and only a moderately impressive one at

that. Remember, it's not coming out until late next year at the very earliest, so it really is far too early to judge the game's quality.

FOCUS ON REALISM

All these people that have a problem with violent games need to take a serious look at what they're saying and what they're implying. I have spent years of my life playing the most violent games I could get my hands on, for the sheer thrill of the action. I've not yet gone and shot anyone, never even considered it as a real solution to any problems I may have with people. Games that focus on realism are good in a sense, as are non-realism games. Most realism games place the player in a situation that they are extremely unlikely to be in at any point. They are in either the situation of a police officer, an army marine, or some such position. Both of the aforementioned occupations teach that going out and nailing someone in the gut (or head, as with many recent FPSs) with a handgun is not the best answer for every situation. Cymon

LETTER OF THE MONTH

PEOPLE SHOWING TRAITS

I am writing to express my concerns on the direction the online Counter-Strike community is heading. The one thing which disgruntles me, and I'm sure hundreds of other CS players, is cheating.

I have been an avid CS player since the beginning. I have seen the game develop from a small insignificant Half-Life mod, into the world's most popular online game.

However, over the past few months, I have noticed more and more people resorting to using things such as "aim-bot" and the dreaded "wall hack", whilst playing online. Just five months ago, during the Christmas holidays, there wouldn't have been nearly half as many players resorting to these "aids" whilst playing in the Internet. However I am beginning to find that these numbers are changing and there are more and more people showing traits of cheating emerging all the time. These people are lame, lazy losers who can only be called cheaters.

What can be done about this problem? You could use the voting system to vote the cheating player off. But 99% of the time, most people couldn't be bothered as you need 50% of people to vote someone off and the team the player is on won't vote because they are going so well for the team. There are also thirdparty anti-cheat programs such as Punk-Buster which are required to play on some servers, and are becoming more common. But these programs are, I've heard, easily hacked and then you get cheating players, playing on an anti-cheat server!

So, to all you cheaters out there - and you know who you are - quit your disgusting habit, get a life and stop destroying the honest Counter-Strike community.

Eugene Mozejko

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DUKE NUKEM FOREVER



DEVELOPER

3D Realms

AVAILABLE

October

PUBLISHER

Gathering of Developers

URL

www.3dreams/Duke4

One of the most anticipated FPS games on the way is Duke Nukem Forever, not only due to its position in the annals of games history but also because it has been so long in development. Promotional material for DNF talks about weapons, vehicles, strippers and cussing but what will make or break DNF is the promise of the most detailed environments yet in an FPS. The heavily modified Unreal engine is capable of some enormous, highly detailed settings, such as the truly impressive real-world city of Las Vegas. Duke can fully interact with his environments, from smashing glass to drinking soft drinks to blowing aliens apart.

C&C RENEGADE



DEVELOPER

Westwood Studios

AVAILABLE

August 2001

PUBLISHER

Westwood Studios

URL

westwood.ea.com/games/ccuniverse/reneegade

The Command & Conquer series has a venerable history in the strategy arena, so the shift to an FPS style game is great way to expand their universe. At the same time, Renegade will bring some strategy heritage to the shooting and give something back to the long-time fans. The forces of NOD, which the player battles as a powerful commando unit, are replicated in all their Westwood glory. Structures act in the same way as in the strategy title, but here you can enter each and see the inner workings. Want to get rid of base defences? Destroy the power generators. Want to stop resource mining? Destroy a harvester or refinery.

RED FACTION



DEVELOPER

Volition

AVAILABLE

September

PUBLISHER

THQ

URL

www.redfaction.com

Firstperson shooters rarely work outside a PC. Which is why Red Faction is still a must-see, despite leading on PS2 earlier in the year. Its biggest claim to fame has always been Geometric Modification, or Geo-Mod, for short. This means that terrain like walls and ceilings can be completely deformed by high-powered weapons. Dig a hole under a wall, collapse a room in on an enemy, shoot someone through a wall (with the help of infra-red sighting). Geo-Mod should blow open a whole new dimension to brute force in tactics. Some truly massive outdoors levels in spectacular detail will also feature, ready to be destroyed.

RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN



DEVELOPER

Gray Matter

AVAILABLE

4th Qtr 2001

PUBLISHER

Activision

URL

www.activision.com/games/wolfenstein

Gray Matter takes up where id Software left off with a sequel that has a serious reputation to live up to. Return to Castle Wolfenstein will see B.J. Blazkowitz take on the might of the Nazi regime once more, complete with zombies, genetic mutants and brownshirts. RtCW uses the Quake3 engine, in a nice bit of symmetry. Gray Matter promises a great deal of interaction with the game environment, with HUD cues displayed when something can be destroyed, climbed or used. No more running hither-and-yon mashing the spacebar! Enemy AI will respond to noise and alert companions when in a pickle. No details on the confirmed multiplayer but this should be a singleplayer event first - anything else second!

MEDAL OF HONOR



DEVELOPER

2015

AVAILABLE

3rd Qtr 2001

PUBLISHER

Electronic Arts

URL

mohaa.ea.com

For high realism, there's nothing like recreating actual historical events. This is just what 2015 has undertaken with Medal of Honor. The top-secret event of E3 succeeded in blowing away all who were allowed into EA's back room. Partake in the Normandy landing and experience the terror evoked by the opening of Saving Private Ryan. Wonderful detail in the physical world is a feature, like shocking realistic explosions, soldiers seeking cover where available and the subtle effects like dust falling from the ceiling of underground bunkers during mortaring. The storyline is central so expect some involved scripting to bring perspective to the events of WWII.

NEW WORLD ORDER



DEVELOPER

Termite Games

AVAILABLE

TBA

PUBLISHER

TBA

URL

www.insomniasoftware.com

On paper, New World Order looks to be more of the same in the current PC climate. Multiplayer squad-based shooter with more than 20 weapons in the arsenal, set in interior and exterior arenas of high-speed mayhem. The whole story is told when you realise that Termite Games (formerly Insomnia Software) has developed an entirely new engine for its debut: the DVA. This engine promises superbly detail in both indoor and outdoor areas, supports full per-pixel diffuse and specular shading as well as high-precision softshadows, skeletal animation, nice 3D-sound and boasts a good networking model. New World Order is a sleeper for now but just wait for its release.

STATE OF PLAY

FIRSTPERSON SHOOTERS

The hallmark of modern PC gaming is the firstperson shooter. And defining game moments? Look no further than Wolf 3D. Or Quake. Or Half-Life. The genre that unites us, the games everyone has played. This month looks at a genre that's been with us more-or-less in its original form for the past ten years: the firstperson action game.

While there are developers still producing games that offer both singleplayer and multiplayer games, it's becoming just as common for the two to be entirely separate entities: Alice and Quake III are the obvious examples. A common goal to both is producing more realism, more detail, better facial animations, skeletal modelling, the list goes on. There isn't a title being produced today that doesn't expound "breakthrough visuals" or "remarkable life-like characters".

Recent singleplayer titles have gone more for a subtle pollination of styles, the so-called "cross-genre" titles. Inventive game design innovation as well as graphical improvements have propelled the singleplayer game.

In contrast, many of the games featured here have gone "ol skool" trigger finger style: Duke Nukem, Red Faction, Return to Castle Wolfenstein. Offering technical advancements in a more pure shooter environment than recent classics (...fighting urge to mention Warren Spector game...), these games are more akin to their online brethren. There's a definite shift here to a simpler, more hectic, less intellectual game style. Phew, my brain was starting to hurt.

The dream of a game that can truly do it all is still the goal. As it stands the "innovators" with their sneaking and multitools present a nice compromise. However the landscape is certainly widening to make room for what the singleplayer games were in the beginning. No light gems, no G.K.Chesterton quotes, just pure fragging mayhem.

The current love of WWII is blooming in all variety of action games: Operation Flashpoint, P.O.W., Battlefield 1942 and of course, Medal of Honor (Americans can't spell, can they?). Is this a cultural response to the passing of that generation? Perhaps the reason I'm a little hesitant to dive in... RIP our digger elders, we gamers mean no disrespect.

The firstperson shooter is one genre enjoying a healthy run, so doubtless there will be something here for your particular taste. The wait for these much-vaunted titles is definitely almost over.

John Dewhurst





Star Wars GALACTIC BATTLEGROUNDS

DETAILS

DEVELOPER

LucasArts

PUBLISHER

LucasArts

AVAILABLE

November

URL

www.lucasarts.com

RESIDENT STAR WARS FANATIC, JOHN DEWHURST, IS TORN BETWEEN THE TERRIBLE PAIN OF THE PHANTOM MENACE AND THE PROMISE OF A BOBA FETT RTS.

Realtime strategy and *Star Wars* is a difficult combination. With *Force Commander* still fresh in the mind, sceptics can be excused their dancing eyebrows (but just this once) at the mention of *Galactic Battlegrounds*, the new RTS title set in the *Star Wars* universe. But we at *PowerPlay* prefer the optimism of infinite possibility to humbug hindsight.

So with a warm heart and our eyes wide open we look to the horizon and see a star, a bright star, that points to the Promised Land - a land where nasty cash-ins have died in the wilderness. They were killed by Imperial stormtroopers and AT-ATs because no one manages resources like a Sith Lord...

Since you can count just about everyone in the Western world as part of the *Star Wars* faithful, it's fair to say that any *Star Wars* game is going to do well regardless of what the media or hardcore gamers think. What is encouraging for the passionate gamer (rather than the dispassionate consumer) is that LucasArts has acknowledged its past wrongs. At E3 this year, you could almost see the hat in one executive's hand as he admitted to the release schedule insanity that occurred when *The Phantom Menace* hit

cinemas. By licensing the *Age of Empires II* engine from RTS maestro developer Ensemble Studios, one certainty is that LucasArts is taking this game fairly seriously as a genre piece.

Your powers are weak old man

Not content to simply redo *Age of Empires* in the *Star Wars* universe, LucasArts has made several important additions to this style of RTS. Flying units have been added while they were never a part of *AoE*. Each civilisation has been given their own variations on the theme (the Rebellion has its X-Wings and A-Wings; the Empire its TIE Bombers, for example). Submarine units will also be available, the obvious race to use them being the Gungans.

The singleplayer campaigns will encompass material from all current *Star Wars* films: *Episode I* and the "classic" trilogy of *Episodes IV, V and VI*. The six races that can be led into battle are the Wookiee, Trade Federation, Royal Naboo, Gungan, Galactic

Empire and Rebel forces. The missions for each race take place during pivotal events of the saga and occur chronologically. Better yet, bonus missions at the end of campaigns will involve events that do not occur in the films.

Lead the Trade Federation in its assault on Naboo with the help of OOM-9, then direct the Gungans with Boss Nass. The

singleplayer campaigns will encompass material from all current *Star Wars* films: *Episode I* and the Classic Trilogy

inclusion of big name *Star Wars* characters as avatars will no doubt thrill aficionados and while not all are featured in the singleplayer campaigns, others can be used in multiplayer, including Yoda and Han Solo, to name just two.

Strike me down

The variety of battlefields will mirror the drastic scene changes of the *Star Wars* films, from Hoth's ice planes to Naboo's swamps, from Tatooine's deserts to the streets of the Imperial City. There are fourteen different



environments in all, with some campaigns played exclusively in the air or underwater. More so than in other RTS titles, environments are being designed to affect the performance of each different civilisation. A variety of strengths and weaknesses will emerge, meaning in all likelihood there won't be any outright wooden spoon races, just diverse forces.

LucasArts has made an effort to make each civilisation visually different but not drastically so in basic structure. Players should feel comfortable changing from one civilisation to another as there are standard buildings with common functions (and the same footprint, for visual clarity) across all civs. Galactic Battlegrounds will feature over 300 different units and structures, many of which can be upgraded in trad RTS style.

And I shall become more powerful

Star Wars mythos has been used to colour the technology tree and upgrading that is de rigeur for modern realtime strategy. Wookiee ingenuity, advanced Gungan biotechnology and Jedi stamina are available on the tech trees of respective races. This offers the expansion of skills that usual RTS upgrades do, while producing that

SHUT UP WITH YOUR JEDI MIND RUBBISH, OKAY?

The dynamic world of Star Wars is ripe for the tailoring of special units: the Jedi an obvious choice. All races will be able to use Jedi and rather than make them one-being-killing-machines, the Jedi rather fills the role of the specialty spy in RTS terms. Wielding a lightsaber is mandatory, so melee combat won't be a problem but Jedi will also be able to convert the weak of mind to their cause. Visually, erm... yes, these aren't the droids we're looking for... where was I?



warm aura of Star Wars detail - a convincing combination.

Resource management involves four currencies: food (from animals, plants and farms), metal (from ore), carbon (from trees, etc.) and ilum (from crystals). Each will power different areas of need, ilum needed to power lightsabers, for example. Each civilisation requires different proportions of each resource, too. So the Wookiees will need more carbon, or trees, for their forest structures while the more technological Empire wants metal and ilum to power its war machine.

Than you can possibly imagine

In true Age of Empires style, the game promises as much multiplayer grunt as

singleplayer thrills. With up to eight players in a game at one time (via LAN or Internet), Galactic Battlegrounds will aim to recreate this facet of Ensemble's masterpiece as closely as possible.

And that's what it really boils down to: doing the two camps proud. A Star Wars game for the fans, a strong strategy game for the players. LucasArts still has some way to go in development with a Christmas release on the cards. A strange new chapter is unfolding: a new LucasArts game and it's not 3D; LEC seeks outside help and offers fully featured single and multiplayer. The evil empire of Force Commander is in danger. Surely you can feel the disturbance in the Force...



Morrowind

WITH HIS +10 GATHER INFORMATION MODIFIER, TIMOTHY C. BEST WAS SENT TO GET THE SCOOP ON BETHESDA'S UPCOMING DAGGERFALL SEQUEL

DETAILS

DEVELOPER
Bethesda

PUBLISHER
Bethesda

AVAILABLE
4th Qtr

URL
www.elder-scrolls.com

I imagine Morrowind's project leader *Todd Howard* to be a wizened little gnome - a cross between a hammer-wielding tinker and a Gandalf-type sprouting improbable white eyebrows. The image is created by the sage words he has to speak, garnered from hard experience, about computerised RPGs and the hands-on knowledge of Morrowind he displays.

It is the third game in the Elder Scrolls series, following *Arena* and *Daggerfall*, and is the fifth game set in the world of Tamriel, the others being *Redguard* and *Battlespire*.

It would seem that these games have laid a hard trail, combining high praise with bitter complaints. Once all of the patches came out, *Daggerfall* was a cult hit with almost limitless adventuring options, using randomly generated dungeons and towns, and hiding a main plot in there somewhere. On the flipside, *Battlespire* forced players into a more hack-and-slash mould and limited the location to a very set area and was widely seen as being as much fun as an Orc's laundry.

Morrowind seems to benefit from a distillation of the wisdom experienced from these highs and lows. It seems that

roleplayers are looking for two main things: flexibility and detail. The quest for both of these often contradictory elements in great draughts seems to define Morrowind.

A World of excitement

The third Elder Scrolls game starts with players being dropped off on the island of Vvardenfell sporting the new occupation of slave. Right from the start players have the option to do as they are told and try to earn their freedom or to nod solemnly at the slaver's words and then just leg it.

The island of Vvardenfell is a part of Morrowind, home of the Dark Elves, and is a location that has immediate repercussions for players. For one, the island is dominated by a huge volcano which spews choking ash into the sky every so often, slowing movement and blocking vision. The volcano also means that the island features a wide variety of landscapes from barren steppes to lush forests. Being the ancestral home of the Dark Elves also means that it is not up there

on the All-time Friendliest Holiday Destination list.

Four games have given Bethesda a huge store of world lore and a good idea of what's popular with the gamers.

"In it's first incarnation it was actually set in Summerset Isle (land of the High Elves), but we thought Morrowind provide a much better experience," Howard says.

thirty crafted cities are brought to life by some of the best 3D graphics ever to grace a roleplaying game

Morrowind is a place in turmoil. The Empire invaded it 400 years ago, meaning the purity of the Dark Elf homeland has been tainted. It also means the island is still caught up in the manoeuvring and political intrigue of various factions. There are also wider problems like the blight slowly draining life from the land. Morrowind provides a backdrop of wild extremes, unusual locales as well as the Empire-established cities.

Variety is the key as Howard explains: "The scope of this game is huge, and



Diversity is assured through the implementation of half a dozen different architectural styles



somewhat unlimited, but in a different way to the other two chapters which had a randomly created world meaning they quickly became monotonous."

To avoid the Daggerfall pitfall, the team at Bethesda have created the whole world by hand, while avoiding the Battlespire

PUT UP YER DUKES



The combat has been described as a cross between Thief, Jedi Knight and System Shock 2. Players can thrust, slash or chop depending on which way they are pushing as they attack. The longer you pull the weapon back the harder it will hit. Bethesda has worked hard to give each type of weapon its own feel in combat so that tactics that work with a rapier are going to be embarrassing with a battleaxe. There will be auto parrying (based on your fighting skill), missile weapons, hit locations, fatigue and over 200 implements with which to do the hurting.

complaints by making it huge. For an adventure game, Redguard was considered to have large area to explore. Morrowind, considered Bethesda's flagship title, will cover about 50 times that real estate.

It will feature just less than 30 crafted cities with six or seven distinct architectural styles highlighting the different flavours of the land and the races living there. Beyond the bounds of the cities there will also be the dungeons and underground levels we all know and love, including several set in the island's dominating volcano.

These locations are brought to life by some of the best 3D graphics ever to grace an RPG game. Bethesda has made it clear they plan to set graphics standards with this one.

All of this comes together to make one impressive world, full of potential, flexibility and detail. In fact, Howard states the detail of the world as being the most impressive aspect of the whole game and it makes you feel like you're really in a fantasy world.

It's Character Building

In a world of this complexity an equally compelling character is called for. The system for generating characters is much the same

as the one in Daggerfall, except things have been balanced a little better. In the previous game, mages and warriors strode tall while sneaks tended to get pulped because their skills lacked punch.

This has been addressed by having 27 skills in the game, nine from each category of stealth, magic and fighting. The team decided that each skill had to be strong enough to be a major skill in its own right, combining minor abilities until they balanced out.

Each character gets ten skills, five major and five minor. Skills increase with use, or study, and when your major skills improve enough you go up a level and get attribute points to spend. To become a better thief you have to use your thieving skills.

Beyond this it's open slather. "You can do anything," says Howard. "You just suck at a lot of it. If you try to do something beyond your character's ability, you'll probably fail, or even hurt yourself."

One dangerous set of skills deserving special attention is magic. Spells in Morrowind are made up of effects. One effect, for example, is 'fire damage'. In any given spell you decide how that damage is applied, at what rate, to what area, and to



The combat system borrows from Thief in that mouse movement simulates each blow



what level.

Effects can also be combined. Howard uses the example of combining 'fire damage' with 'demoralise' so that a caster can create a protective three-metre circle of flame that causes enemies inside it to run away (presumably through the flame). Spell-tacular!

Learning choice spell effects will be a goal of wizards throughout the game. I can see some nasty signature spells popping up. "My character did what, while turning into what ... and then imploded? What the hell did I walk into?"

Players with alchemy skills can also have some fun mixing their own potions. Ingredients can be bought or found in the wild, but they all will have good points and side effects. Two ingredients with the same property have to be mixed before you get an effect, but with the side effects of each element what you get is maybe more than you bargained for.

Once you have designed your character, assembled your skills and chosen his or her appearance you'll be able to see how you look in the world from the thirdperson point of view (known to the development team as "vanity mode".) although you'll quickly switch back to the firstperson view for the action.

People to See

Once you have world, and someone to possess this firstperson perspective for you, all you need is the supporting cast of thousands to breath life into the world. In Morrowind there will be a staggering number of inhabitants, with estimates of approximately 2000 virtual souls.

Interacting with NPCs is wide open. Say you have a vase you can interact with, that's not too exciting. Say you have antique collectors in the game, then it opens up all sorts of choices for the player and roles for NPCs.

You can learn from them, barter with them to ride their boat to the next city, you can threaten, beat on them, be attacked by them, plot with or be plotted against and so much more. How they treat you depends mainly on how they see you, or their disposition.

"Many of the game systems affect it and use it. So if a guy really likes you, you'll get more info from him, better prices, and he'll be less apt to attack you," explains Howard.

Disposition is affected by what you have done to a character, your manners, whether

you are in an opposing or allied faction, your race and even what you are wearing. Something as simple, and obvious, as changing out of prisoner robes can make all the difference when trying to get a good price on a hacksaw.

The NPCs do not always work alone either. A lot of political unrest is rumbling just below the surface of Morrowind and many factions and guilds vie for power. Joining one of either of these should provide

disposition is affected by what you have done, your manners, whether you are in an opposing or allied faction, your race

support but also guarantees making new enemies.

The guilds bring a character's chosen role to life as Bethesda has really tried to inject a lot more story into the guild quests so you can feel a real progression (in the story and the world) as you rise through the ranks. Want to forget the main quest and become a social climber? Go for it, there's a game worth of play right there, especially if you do it right.



Bethesda is promising to set new standards for RPGs in terms of graphics technology

Cry Freedom

Bethesda's oracle Howard sums up the driving idea behind Morrowind in one compound word: free-form.

"Let the player do what they want, and have the game world react accordingly" seems to be the motto behind the game.

This extends through all aspects of the game: from the ability to create your own spells based on the components you know to the ability to use any skill or wear any armour even if you are so bad at it you are a threat to no-one but yourself. You can even kill any NPC in the game, even the ones who

drive the main quest. After that point you can still complete the game but it does make it "really, really hard", as Howard puts it.

The balance between telling an involving story and freedom is a tricky one.

"That's a very big issue for us," Howard admits. "We provide a host of quests in the game. Most are just there for you to experience, but we also have a bunch that form the 'main quest'.

"These are linear for the most part, but really open up near the end. The main quest has an obvious story progression, but the other quests really let you know more about

the world and are centred around specific towns and such."

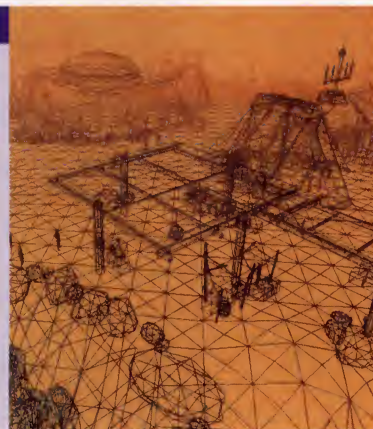
Morrowind has been several years in the making but when you are looking at game of this size and with this many possible quests, not to mention NPCs, it's not surprising. We know Bethesda can do big and open-ended from Daggerfall and we know that they can do bright and colourful from Redguard.

Can they do both, without bugs creeping into the holes left by thousands of options? We'll have to wait just a few months to see.

A WORLD OF YOUR OWN

The Elder Scrolls Construction Kit is one impressive piece of technology. It could be the most convenient world-building tool since Acme Instant City (just add water). Without it, there is no way Bethesda could have modelled a world combining such high detail and large scope. It allows the construction of buildings and towns in record time by having modular units that click together in a variety of ways, which have all the information that part of the building needs. Once you have placed them you can modify the piece, inside and out with minor changes and enhancements. The Construction Kit also allows editing of

pretty much anything in the game. You can lovingly recreate your old Daggerfall character if you want. You can create new lands, NPCs and adventures. You can even set NPCs to a schedule so that they will go about their business if unaccompanied by the player. The development team call each of the changes made using the Construction Kit 'plug-ins'. These will be easy to swap between players, allowing all manner of user-made add-on adventures. The game offers a safeguard by keeping track of the plug-ins and allowing them to be removed by erasing them, which causes the game to snap back to how it was.



REC •

THE TOP 100 GAMES OF ALL TIME

100:01⁰⁰

THE RULES

To be eligible for Top 100 consideration, a game only has to be commercially available for the PC. To determine the final list, we simply asked ourselves: what is the best game you could play today? The Top 100 was compiled by PCPP and written by **Timothy C. Best**

Our inaugural Top 100 last year was an Olympic effort. It was the year of the Sydney Games and we assembled games that pushed faster, stronger and higher. Twelve months later we assemble the greatest games once again to compete in the most advanced sifting process modern science can provide.

Our psychologists have been poking, prodding and making our contestants partake in a series of activities to see how they work together as a team: stacking crates, finding keys, pressing buttons and collecting wood, stone and/or gold.

Out of the thousands of entrants some shined, others just missed the cut.









Half the panel loved Myst; the others hated her, but in the end a hissy fit that she was interactive and beautiful, she

WAAAASSSS!!!!, caused Soldier of Fortune to fire off a single round. Slideshows, you are the weakest link.

After that he made everyone so edgy a little war in Latveria was arranged as a handy distraction.

Our 100 remaining games have been assembled in one house to be played and studied continuously. With over 24 cameras, including free roaming, over the shoulder, firstperson, thirdperson and isometric, we will be with them every step, every whisper.

Will Lara come out on top or will her overuse of lip gloss and reluctance to show skin in the house be her undoing? Will Black & White's two-facedness rub people the wrong way? Maybe the Nameless One's new blonde spiked hairdo will prove a hit. Stay tuned and see who stays and who goes.

100	SCORE 91% DEVELOPER BUNGIE RELEASED 1999 REVIEWED PCPP #35	MYTH 2 Myth 2 got rid of all the wooden (stony, money) aspects of RTS, leaving you with lively characters and great pitched melee. Artfully moved between tragedy, black comedy and slapstick when the limbs flew.	
99		INSANE 4x4, flying off cliffs, ignoring street signs (and the streets they sign), rolling over the competition arcade action. Destruction derbies, articulated trucks, deceptively treacherous tracks and multiplayer make this a quick fix of Insane fun.	SCORE 87% DEVELOPER INVICTUS RELEASED 2000 REVIEWED PCPP #56
98	SCORE NA DEVELOPER BULLFROG RELEASED 1992 REVIEWED NA	SYNDICATE An early squad-based combat game remembered by fans for its exquisite dark tone, choice of missions and cool isometric strategy. Miniguns and mind control... boy did they nail the future of corporate life.	
97		STAR CONTROL 2 Take to the stars in a half-complete starship of ancient alien construction and end up in the middle of a war commanding a vast fleet. Winning combination of RPG and tactical space combat. Ur-Quan... they, my friends, were villains!	SCORE NA DEVELOPER ACCOLADE RELEASED 1992 REVIEWED NA
96	SCORE 96% DEVELOPER FIRAXIS RELEASED 1999 REVIEWED PCPP #36	ALPHA CENTAURI You can't hide Civ II ^{1/2} by adding alien life forms, hover tanks and over intellectualised sci-fi jargon that could bring tears of joy to Trekkers. Kinda pompous but Civ-engrossing at heart.	
95		GABRIEL KNIGHT 3 Jane Jensen's Gabe 3 had more twists than a Chubby Checker reunion tour. Sometimes frustrating but more often compelling, GK3 took history and warped it into a memorable tale of ancient orders and buried secrets.	SCORE 87% DEVELOPER SIERRA RELEASED 1999 REVIEWED PCPP #44
94	SCORE 86% DEVELOPER INNERLOOP RELEASED 2001 REVIEWED PCPP #57	PROJECT IGI Live by the bullet, die by the bullet. IGI used realistic one or two shot kills to devastating effect, especially when they kill you as effectively as the terrorists.	
93		WARZONE 2100 Made use of real 3D terrain, extensive research trees and custom units. On-the-fly objectives gave a more convincing mission structure than the competition.	SCORE 88% DEVELOPER PUMPKIN STUDIO RELEASED 1999 REVIEWED PCPP #38
92	SCORE NA DEVELOPER ORIGIN RELEASED 1992 REVIEWED NA	ULTIMA 7 Few games today match the feel of a living world created by this gem. This is seen by many as the finest in the Ultima series, with a dizzying level of freedom.	
91		PRIVATEER 1&2 Open-ended space trading and exploration spanning four quadrants of stars. Tight design and a good dose of freedom make this an Origin classic.	SCORE NA DEVELOPER ORIGIN RELEASED 1992 REVIEWED NA



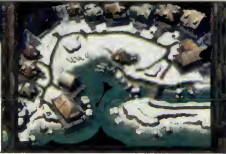



ALPHA CENTAURI

behaviour produced hostility in a lot of the younger RPGs and the FPS games who kept offering Ultima medpacks if he'd stop grinding wheat.





"As to my eviction I'm totally perplexed. The Social Engineering Initiative was coming along nicely and if the group had listened to their better angels a new world could have been formed from the disparate community ...one of beauty and strength. Short-sighted phillistines."




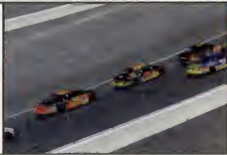






"Well, this is all idle speculation but some evictions were more obvious than others. Syndicate came in and tried to take things over right away. "Star Control 2 tried to 'explore' every room at least 17 times and Privateer went around trying to trade the other contestants salt shakers, bath plugs and anything else that might have been worth more in another part of the 'quadrant'."

"Ultima 7 started baking bread. That

90	SCORE 88% DEVELOPER MAGNETIC FIELD RELEASED 1999 REVIEWED PCPP #44	RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP 2000 Firmly based on the final event of the FIA World Rally Championships, the Network Q RAC Rally, this game is fast, has a strong physics engine and an extremely harrowing course design.	
89	 SCORE 91% DEVELOPER MICROPROSE RELEASED 1998 REVIEWED PCPP #25	M1 TANK PLATOON 2 Take to the battlefield in a virtual juggernaut. M1 is everything a military sim should be: well researched, packing plenty of tactical options and having a very heavy armour division. Tank sim par excellence.	
88	SCORE 80% DEVELOPER BLACK ISLE RELEASED 2000 REVIEWED PCPP #52	ICEWIND DALE Black Isle's take on AD&D, using BioWare's Baldur's Gate engine, was lovely and evoked the enchanting sensation that you were walking in a living myth. Classy hack'n'slash with a nicely crafted epic plot.	
87	 SCORE 88% DEVELOPER TURBINE RELEASED 2000 REVIEWED PCPP #50	ASHERON'S CALL Online fantasy roleplaying game marked by great freedom to develop your character using stats and skills, not classes. Various melee attack speeds and types plus custom-spells all make Dereth magic.	
86	SCORE 83% DEVELOPER DREAMWORKS RELEASED 2001 REVIEWED PCPP #60	UNDYING Clive Baker's involvement in the game might be hard to put a finger on but this game is not. It's got creep-factor, looks the part and features unique weapons-one-hand, spells-the-other monster-blasting action.	
85	 SCORE 90% DEVELOPER BIG TIME SOFTWARE RELEASED 2000 REVIEWED PCPP #56	COMBAT MISSION The wargame for WWII armchair generals. Features full 3D terrain, troops that act like people not mindless robots, huge maps, 45 scenarios as well as the required historical accuracy. Much, much, better than being there.	

Ms Croft, Mrs Croft, do you have a moment? What's it like in there and how do you feel about your performance? "Well, I am technically dead at the moment, after The Last Revelation, so expectations were always quite low. As it was I did my best, but I'm happy I'm out. I got so sick of the guys pointing and yelling, "Hey, didn't you marry that hillbilly Billy-Bob?", and then laughing themselves senseless. It got quite tedious. Anyway, I'm going to go and enjoy my after-life for a while - I'm sure Core can't do without me and will be resurrecting me soon enough. Maybe you could let them know about this little tribe in Southern Borneo, great little ritual..."

84	SCORE NA DEVELOPER MICROPROSE RELEASED 1994 REVIEWED NA	X-COM: ENEMY UNKNOWN Combined nearly open-ended gameplay with an involving plot and impeccable turn-based combat. The little squaddies seemed to come to life.	
83	 SCORE 85% DEVELOPER MUCKY FOOT RELEASED 1999 REVIEWED PCPP #46	URBAN CHAOS Policing the end of the millennium isn't easy. Run around beating people up, hop in a car and cruise, and deal with a nasty cult. Moody, free-wheeling action.	
82	SCORE 94% DEVELOPER CORE RELEASED 1996 REVIEWED PCPP #9	TOMB RAIDER The original and best. Lara brought a freedom of movement and agility never fully realised before in a 3D game, creating a hypnotic tale of adventure.	
81	 SCORE 90% DEVELOPER SPORT INTERACTIVE RELEASED 2000 REVIEWED PCPP #57	CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 00/01 This football spreadsheet gripped soccer fans like claws of life possessed. Mind-bogglingly huge stats database, with complex team morale and realistic results.	

80	SCORE 90% DEVELOPER ODDWORLD INHABITANTS RELEASED 1997 REVIEWED PCPP #18	ABE'S ODDYSEE Oddysee showed that side-scrolling platform games still have a place. Its cute characters, humour and dark setting made this a fable with heart.		<p>popping into Nomad Soul to play a couple of gigs, and lounging around Startopia dressed as Ziggy Stardust. So ended what also looked like a budding romance between Ziggy and the Sea Reaper Delphi.</p> <p>"At least Delphi won't keep tracking water into my bar," said an anonymous source strongly suspected to be Startopia management, "It was almost becoming a full time job for one of those blobbly, aliens ... you know the ones..."</p>
79	 SCORE 82% DEVELOPER MICROSOFT RELEASED 2001 REVIEWED PCPP #57	LINKS 2001 Links teaches the uninitiated that golf could be fun, not just a course in anger management. The latest in the series comes with a course editor.		
78	SCORE 93% DEVELOPER ACTIVISION RELEASED 1999 REVIEWED PCPP #40	HEAVY GEAR 2 Using Dream Pod 9's world and featuring everything from OG combat to sniper missions this game kicked the Mechwarriors off the top of the heap.		
77	 SCORE 93% DEVELOPER PAPYRUS RELEASED 2001 REVIEWED PCPP #60	NASCAR 4 Pain-staking recreations of the NASCAR world from Indianapolis to Daytona are just the beginning. Awesome physics makes this a 750hp beast.		
76	SCORE 93% DEVELOPER QUADRATIC DREAM RELEASED 1999 REVIEWED PCPP #44	THE NOMAD SOUL Blending beat 'em up action and mystery adventure has produced some twisted freaks. This is a beautiful freak that has magic; crossing genres as easily as you'd cross a street. David Bowie also adds his talents.		<p>A sombre mood came over the house today. Our cameras picked up tears on several faces as they suffered a double blow. Regular watchers will know that Guybrush Threepwood always has a quick word to cheer the most jaded personality. Who will forget the highlight watching Diablo 2's Necromancer have milk come out of his nose after a Threepwood zinger?</p> <p>They also lost David Bowie, possibly the coolest man on Earth, who had been</p>
75	 SCORE 94% DEVELOPER NEW WORLD COMPUTING RELEASED 1999 REVIEWED PCPP #35	HEROES OF MIGHT & MAGIC 3 More monsters, more heroes, more spells, more options. HoMMII was a phenomena amongst fans of turn-based strategy fantasy and this is bigger and better in every way while staying true to the winning formula.		
74	SCORE 91% DEVELOPER TOPWARE RELEASED 2000 REVIEWED #53	EARTH 2150 Impressive 3D RTS which introduces the pressure of Earth being flambéed in 183 days, requiring 1,000,000 credits to be raised during the campaigns to fund evacuation. Puts the race back into arms race.		
73	 SCORE 90% DEVELOPER LUCASARTS RELEASED 2000 REVIEWED PCPP #55	ESCAPE FROM MONKEY ISLAND The fourth in the adventure series and the first trip into 3D. Ridiculous (anyone for Monkey Kombat or The Palace of Prostheses?) and absolutely LucasArts sublime. Fun for anyone and everyone.		
72	SCORE 90% DEVELOPER MICROPROSE RELEASED 2001 REVIEWED PCPP #57	B-17 2 Combat flight sim which takes you into WWII big skies leaping between control of the team members (who can all interact) of a B-17's flight crew, from pilot to bomber and gunner. Very cool.		
71	 SCORE 89% DEVELOPER BLIZZARD RELEASED 2000 REVIEWED PCPP #53	DIABLO 2 Tried and true formula which doesn't really do anything new but does do hack'n'slash in the most addictive manner possible. High fantasy, a veritable magical arsenal and fast gameplay make this a crowd pleaser.		

MANNY CALAVERA

So Manny, a lot of those guys in there send business your way. What was it like hanging out with the guys, doing dumb activities and having that strange chick wear bunny ears and slap her rump?

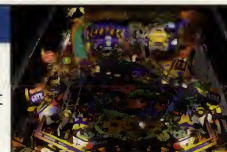
off say bye to the pinball machine. Sometimes people find it so hard to look past the job. People think Sarah-Marie has it tough being a strip club operator, try being a working stiff like me.

"Ah well, Buenos Dias."

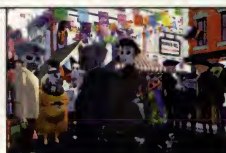
70
SCORE
90%
DEVELOPER
EMPIRE
RELEASED
1998
REVIEWED
PCPP #33

BIG RACE USA PRO PINBALL

Our pick in the world of little silver balls bouncing through fantastically-themed tables racking up points. It all comes together with a shamelessly good soundtrack.



69



GRIM FANDANGO

Slick, stylish and clever. With the adventure genre at its lowest ebb LucasArts made you wish your last dance will be as beautiful, entertaining and soulful.

SCORE
91%
DEVELOPER
LUCASARTS
RELEASED
1998
REVIEWED
PCPP #31

68

SCORE
91%
DEVELOPER
WESTWOOD
RELEASED
2001
REVIEWED
PCPP #56

RED ALERT 2

Westwood decided to go full steam ahead and pile on the action, the pace, the over-the-top characters and not take itself too seriously. Good choice.



67



CRIMSON SKIES

Nathan Zachary is a cad, a rake and air-pirate of note. The swinging 20s atmosphere, combined with the 50s hotrod-mentality make this action special.

SCORE
89%
DEVELOPER
ZIPPER INTERACTIVE
RELEASED
2000
REVIEWED
PCPP #55

66

SCORE
92%
DEVELOPER
REDSTORM INTERACTIVE
RELEASED
1999
REVIEWED
PCPP #44

ROGUE SPEAR

Rainbow Six brought us a shooter that was realistic where preparation was everything. Rogue Spear refined and improved. Brilliant tactical shooter that has rightly been the inspiration for many games.



65



TWINSEN'S ODYSSEY

For some reason Twinsen's continuing Big Little Adventure draws you into its world and makes you really wonder what's over the next kooky hill. Interesting characters, unique setting and enjoyable play all help.

SCORE
84%
DEVELOPER
ADELINE
RELEASED
1997
REVIEWED
PCPP #15

64

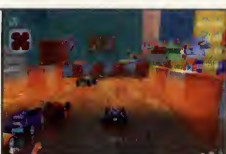
SCORE
92%
DEVELOPER
DIGITAL IMAGE DESIGN
RELEASED
1998
REVIEWED
PCPP #31

TOTAL AIR WAR

Dynamic campaigns with missions flown in realtime mean that no two games will quite the same. The air combat model is highly realistic but optional assists open this up to anyone with jet fighting aspirations.



63



REVOLT

About as much fun as you can have with arcade racing. The remote controlled cars bounce around the courses you dreamed of constructed while Mum was picking up Grandma. Simple game; great multiplayer antics.

SCORE
82%
DEVELOPER
PROBE STUDIOS
RELEASED
1999
REVIEWED
PCPP #41

62

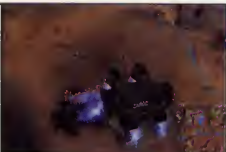
SCORE
86%
DEVELOPER
RAINBOW STUDIOS
RELEASED
2000
REVIEWED
PCPP #51

MOTOCROSS MADNESS 2

Dirt bike racing has never been this radical or easy to pick up and play. The tracks and open, undulating stages are huge, varied, and afford plenty of wild air-time. Most of all, this game is smoooooth.



61



Z: STEEL SOLDIERS

Another one of those RTS games that just wants to have fun. The funny thing is while it's having fun so are you. It's a furious ride with some seriously clever and balanced design.

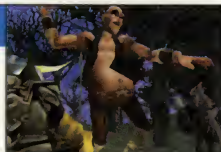

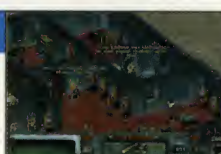
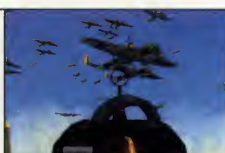






SCORE
86%
DEVELOPER
BITMAP BROTHERS
RELEASED
2001
REVIEWED
PCPP #63

60	SCORE 88% DEVELOPER SMOKING CAR RELEASED 1997 REVIEWED PCPP #13	THE LAST EXPRESS While graphics date in a blink of an eye, ideas, smart writing and a good script take much longer to go out of style. Add to all these an innovative non-linear style of play game and you have a top-notch adventure.	
59		DIRT TRACK RACING SERIES Ratbag's first game Powerslide used scalable graphics before there was a buzzword for it to produce an underrated, but brilliant racing game. DTR is the follow up and is high-power, low traction, racing at its best.	SCORE 90% DEVELOPER RATBAG RELEASED 2000 REVIEWED PCPP #55
58	SCORE NA DEVELOPER BLUE SKY PRODUCTIONS RELEASED 1992 REVIEWED PCPP #NA	ULTIMA UNDERWORLD: THE STYGIAN ABYSS Okay, you're not likely to play it much now but Stygian Abyss is a major marker on the RPG landscape. It was firstperson, dabbled in 3D, and kept people dungeon crawling into the wee hours. We demand a remake.	
57		VANGERS A tough game to comes to grips with but one filled with alien atmosphere and great freedom. Take assignments as you please, upgrade your machos, drive through, burrow under and fly over the deformable terrain.	SCORE 53% DEVELOPER K-D LAB RELEASED 1998 REVIEWED PCPP #29
56	SCORE 83% DEVELOPER MICROSOFT RELEASED 2000 REVIEWED PCPP #57	COMBAT FLIGHT SIM 2 Set in the Pacific Theatre of WWII this is the game for flight enthusiasts who find the idea of landing on a Yank aircraft carrier, in a crosswind, after gruelling dogfights with the Japs irresistible. Attention to detail.	
55		ZEUS A simple interface, lots of options and strong story elements involving gods that need to be dealt with and legendary heroes needing to be wooed all add to the great city-building heart of this game.	SCORE 91% DEVELOPER IMPRESSION GAMES RELEASED 2001 REVIEWED PCPP #58
54	SCORE 88% DEVELOPER ILLUSION SOFTWARES RELEASED 1999 REVIEWED PCPP #41	HIDDEN & DANGEROUS Great combination of squad-based interaction featuring 1st or 3rd person action set in a convincing WWII world. All this and looks too.	
53		SIMCITY 3000 Will Wright's city building toy. The options are endless with all the buildings, emergencies, monuments, terrain types and so on. Learn to juggle - quick!	SCORE 90% DEVELOPER MAXIS RELEASED 1999 REVIEWED PCPP #35
52	SCORE 59% DEVELOPER APPEAL RELEASED 1999 REVIEWED PCPP #40	OUTCAST Outcast takes some getting used to but once you do, you will notice a beautiful world worth saving and an engaging 3D action/adventure.	
51		FLIGHT UNLIMITED 3 Who would have thought just cruising the friendly skies would be so much fun? So many aircraft and airports to choose from, lovingly recreated scenery. Lush.	SCORE 89% DEVELOPER LOOKING GLASS STUDIOS RELEASED 1999 REVIEWED PCPP #43

ZEUS

That Shodan is nasty. She reminds me of the wife. It was ridiculous ... as the ruler of the Greek pantheon I'm in a position of responsibility ... like I can't be trusted not to smuggle jerky! "I was all smiles at the time, but, mark my words, we'll see how smug that Shodan is after a well-placed lightning bolt..."

So Zeus, what happened? Being a god and all you were quite the favourite. "Everything was going well, I tell you I was funny, charming and was slaying them with my stories about Hercules, Xena and what happens to traffic inspectors when they die in ancient Greece ... then, all of a sudden, the rest of the games somehow get this mad idea that I snuck in beef jerky and was holding out on them. "System Shock's AI was the ringleader.

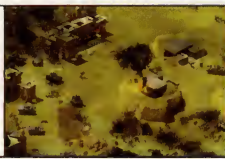



50	SCORE 90% DEVELOPER VERANT INTERACTIVE RELEASED 1999 REVIEWED PCPP #39	EVERQUEST EverQuest brought into being a stunning fantasy-based persistent world. Not only was in 3D it was lovely. Large world, plenty of classes, hidden areas... so addictive it became popularly known as EverCrack.			
49		ALIENS VS PREDATOR Finally a game that captured the individual feels of these sci-fi movies and answered cravings for a crossover. Whether a Colonial Marine, Predator or Alien each play style is unique and brilliantly cinematic. Lock and load.	SCORE 96% DEVELOPER REBELLION RELEASED 1999 REVIEWED PCPP #37		
48	SCORE 88% DEVELOPER BLACK ISLE RELEASED 1998 REVIEWED PCPP #32	FALLOUT 2 One of the defining RPGs and an instant benchmark, if not classic. This game had dangerous combat, striking characters and let you conquer puzzles how you chose, from using charm to ordinance. Wonderful and wry.			
47		BATTLE OF BRITAIN Lets you play a long, detailed, campaign-style game either bombing Poms or repulsing Germans. Players set their plans and then can jump into any plane for some dogfighting. Spitfires, Hurricanes, BF109s, oh my!	SCORE 90% DEVELOPER ROWAN SOFTWARE RELEASED 2001 REVIEWED PCPP #59		
46	SCORE 92% DEVELOPER NEVERSOFT RELEASED 2001 REVIEWED PCPP #58	TONY HAWK 2 Some games nail the basics of play so well they escape their niche. Tony Hawk is one of these games. The setting is street-hip, the moves are spectacular and skateboarding TH-style rocks. Try it.			
45		ENEMY ENGAGED: COMANCHE VS HOKUM Helicopter combat which swings from sim to arcade depending on your settings. Either way it offers a challenge and a thrill that's accessible to everyone. The heli game that rises above the rest.	SCORE 91% DEVELOPER RAZORWORKS RELEASED 2000 REVIEWED PCPP #50		
44	TONY HAWK Watching these scenes of the remaining competitors playing with a half chewed tennis ball, and talking about lint, what can you tell us about being in there? "Well, being in extreme sports, I'm used to being in some gnarly situations ... but what's going on in there is scary. Who'd have thought some Mort Clan Daimyo guy would break my best board learning to grind? He had this sword... it wasn't right."	SCORE 91% DEVELOPER CODEMASTERS RELEASED 1998 REVIEWED PCPP #37	TOCA 2 Rally car racing with damage, high speed, tight control and spectacular graphics. Features all of the cars and the tracks of the 1998 British Touring Car Challenge.		
		43		BATTLEZONE One of the first games to successfully combine RTS gameplay (including building and resource management) with first-person sci-fi tank action.	SCORE 90% DEVELOPER ACTIVISION RELEASED 1998 REVIEWED PCPP #22
		42	SCORE 91% DEVELOPER JANE'S RELEASED 2000 REVIEWED PCPP #47	JANES FA/18 HORNET Janes has long been popular for its anal recreation of military hardware for sims and Hornet is no exception. It's flight model and avionics are spot on.	
		41		STARTOPIA The first space station management sim. Earn a profit while maintaining order, controlling crime and building something to rival Babylon 5 or at least a Vegas hotel.	SCORE 88% DEVELOPER MUCKY FOOT RELEASED 2001 REVIEWED PCPP #63

40	SCORE 88% DEVELOPER GEOFF CRAMMOND/MICROPROSE RELEASED 1996 REVIEWED PCPP #53	GRAND PRIX 3 <p>An F1 driving experience with technical details to make engineers weep, deadly accurate tracks and much more. It's a labour of love.</p> 	FALCON 4.0 <p>"You call that house a simulation area? Where's the manual?" "Look at the walls. When it comes to construction, I am just a layperson but everyone knows that standard double brick walls are 11.5" thick ... those things are approximately 1/4 inch fibreboard with cameras behind them. This rough mock-up is a slap in the flap. If they are going to simulate a house they should simulate a house. They should have run supports through the walls and maybe had some sort of sound dampener so they thudded properly when you tested the assonance." "There are no windows. With today's 3D technology we could look out on convincing portrayals of civilian life from anywhere in the world. I just don't think they understand what a simulation is. How many engineers, statistical analyses and real-world consultants could they have had?"</p>
39		JAGGED ALLIANCE 2 <p>Hand pick your merc team from some of the most character-packed individuals in videogamedome. Strategic roleplaying with heaps of personality.</p>	
38	SCORE NA DEVELOPER FUNCOM RELEASED 2000 REVIEWED NA	THE LONGEST JOURNEY <p>Out of Norway, this game boasts an amazing story spanning two worlds. Has the looks and polish to go with the tale. Fantabulous.</p> 	
37		ONI <p>Anime babe Konoko bats, throws, kicks and blasts her way fluidly through this game with style and grim grrl power. Manga action has never been so smooth.</p>	
36	SCORE 95% DEVELOPER VOLITION RELEASED 1999 REVIEWED PCPP #44	FREESPACE 2 <p>Visually amazing space combat game which makes you think George Lucas was slacking during Star War's climatic space battles. The story draws you into the space opera and the effects and feel make you want to stay.</p> 	SCORE 98% DEVELOPER CAVEDOG RELEASED 1997 REVIEWED PCPP #18
35		TOTAL ANNIHILATION <p>Took the tired RTS basics and coated them in glorious pseudo 3D adding a host of sparkling little touches that elevated this above the norm. The balance here was tightrope-fine and the gameplay just as tight.</p>	
34	SCORE 90% DEVELOPER SIERRA RELEASED 1999 REVIEWED PCPP #46	SWAT 3 <p>Playing the game properly could mean never having to fire a shot as your plans leave no option but calm surrender. The AI was clever and you had a plethora of tactics at your disposal. Intelligent shooter.</p> 	
33		STARCRAFT <p>Offered three distinct styles of play, one for each race, a compelling and entwining plot and exceptional multiplayer gaming. StarCraft's options, colour and diversity has marked wave after wave of following RTS games.</p>	
32	SCORE 98% DEVELOPER MICROPROSE RELEASED 1998 REVIEWED PCPP #33	FALCON 4 <p>This game reached for the sky and actually manages to tag a few clouds. Its dynamic campaign includes peripheral warring ground forces and it's so detail-packed the manual is a 500-page tome.</p> 	SCORE 96% DEVELOPER MELBOURNE HOUSE RELEASED 1999 REVIEWED PCPP #43
31		GP500 <p>If you take your motorbike racing seriously, this is the game for you. Without assists newbies won't complete a lap. There are 14 tracks from the 1998 season, the real riders and six bikes. The real deal.</p>	

CATE ARCHER

"I don't ever want to leave! It's totally groovy in there. Where else do you get chauffeured around by rally drivers onto big space corvettes where you witness pink worms battle it out with granules and holy hand-grenades? I've gone into the arena against those big boys James and that other guy, you know the guy, the guy who drives the funky Volkov and has that religious name? Yeah well anyway I went into the arena with those boys and I came

out on top. I look better, I can do the splits and I can certainly look good in more than just a stupid Tuxedo. Tuxedos are just so passe don't you think? Give me orange striped jumpsuits any day, and those great big funky glasses, Lara Croft? Who's Lara Croft? What do you mean, I've been passed out on the couch the whole time? Yeah, there were a lot of psychedelic colours but I thought they were just those crazy space nebulas..."

30	SCORE 90% DEVELOPER TEAM 17 RELEASED 2001 REVIEWED PCPP #62	WORMS WORLD PARTY If you've never played Worms the idea of cartoony warring gastropods will just sound gimmicky. If you have, than you're likely to be a hopeless addict.	
29	 SCORE 92% DEVELOPER CDV RELEASED 2000 REVIEWED PCPP #60	SUDDEN STRIKE Interesting cross between RTS and wargame, combining the units and setting of WWII and real-time play dynamics. Recognisable, accessible and engaging.	
28	SCORE 85% DEVELOPER CODEMASTERS RELEASED 2001 REVIEWED PCPP #57	COLIN MCRAE RALLY 2.0 Gets rid of all the frilly bits and straps you painfully into the driver's seat. Intense physics and exacting car handling combine to make one lean rally experience.	
27	 SCORE 85% DEVELOPER PARTICLE SYSTEMS RELEASED 2001 REVIEWED PCPP #63	I-WAR 2 I-War brought hard sci-fi realism to space combat with proper representations of inertia and rotational momentum. This is flight, but not as you know it.	
26	SCORE 90% DEVELOPER MONOLITH RELEASED 2000 REVIEWED PCPP #56	NO ONE LIVES FOREVER Imagine GoldenEye crossed with Austin Powers and you're pretty much there. Unlike many games which just poke fun, this is actually fun to play with tight gameplay, delicate pacing and variety. Yeah, baby!	
25	 SCORE 92% DEVELOPER MICROPROSE RELEASED 1996 REVIEWED PCPP #10	MASTER OF ORION 2 Five years later and you still read comparisons between it and any 4x space game raise it's tentacle-y head. Exemplary sci-fi game, allowing great tactical and design freedom, which offered a galaxy of depth.	
24	SCORE 95% DEVELOPER PAPYRUS RELEASED 1998 REVIEWED PCPP #30	GRAND PRIX LEGENDS Masterful sim of early racing days where engines were big and tyres were narrow. This is a game for the fearless, it will not be mastered easily and beginners will soar off the track like it's worth points. Outstanding.	
23	 SCORE 92% DEVELOPER ROWAN SOFTWARE RELEASED 1999 REVIEWED PCPP #42	MIG ALLEY Imagine dogfights at near the speed of sound with radar lock a pipe dream. Mig Alley is high-velocity, low-flying, action that puts all the air forces the Korean peninsula at your disposal. Highly challenging and rewarding.	
22	SCORE 90% DEVELOPER UBISOFT RELEASED 2001 REVIEWED PCPP #60	F1 RACING CHAMPIONSHIP With sparkling graphics, beautiful modelling of speed interacting with the world, many driving modes and exacting car set-up, Ubisoft has taken pole position in the Formula One racing scene.	
21	 SCORE 90% DEVELOPER MASSIVE ENTERTAINMENT RELEASED 2000 REVIEWED PCPP #52	GROUND CONTROL Ground Control showed people 3D RTS games didn't have to have an interface capable of inducing mental disorders. GC showed it could break a lot of conventions and for the better. Lots of action and pretty 3D.	

20

SCORE
92%

DEVELOPER
CREATIVE
ASSEMBLY

RELEASED
2000

REVIEWED
PCPP #50

SHOGUN

This is a massive game with a realtime strategy element placing you in command of up to thousands of individual warriors per battle squaring off against an AI based on the principles of Sun Tzu's Art of War. The turn-based strategic map used between battles is like Zen art in its simple elegance, and so many small touches make the Cherry Blossom atmosphere almost intoxicating. Inspired.



19



UNREAL TOURNAMENT

Visual magnificence marks this game. When the FPS world was dominated by id, Epic stepped up to the big league with singleplayer Unreal. Tournament was the follow-up with sights set firmly on multiplayer gaming. It brought maximum flash and dazzle to FPS with two fire modes per weapon, homing nukes, guns that let you teleport to your target, outrageous level design, huge multiplayer customisation and singing, dancing, play.

SCORE
94%

DEVELOPER
EPIC

RELEASED
1999

REVIEWED
PCPP #45

18

SCORE
90%

DEVELOPER
SHINY

RELEASED
2000

REVIEWED
PCPP #55

SACRIFICE

Miraculous combination of RTS and run-and-gun firstperson action, with opulent colours, surreal creatures and a twisted fairy-tale vibe. Resources are limited to mana and souls which the player-wizard reaps via bouncy-oodoo Sac-Doctors who raise the fallen and then sacrifice them to your gods ... er ... soul pool. On the field real soldiers are summoned not constructed. Mad genius Shiny at its best: inventive, clever and out there.



17



CIVILIZATION 2

One of few games you can call a masterpiece without starting a riot. Civ 2 is required reading for game designers and rarely puts a foot wrong. The combination of real-world accomplishments and being able to shape a society from hunter-gather to hunter-killer missiles is a heady mix few games have matched.

SCORE
9/10

DEVELOPER
MICROPROSE

RELEASED
1996

REVIEWED
PCPP #1

16

SCORE
93%

DEVELOPER
BIOWARE

RELEASED
2000

REVIEWED
PCPP #53

BALDUR'S GATE 2


Painstakingly hand drawn backgrounds, strong plot, refined game design, overall polish and intriguing NPC character interactions (including surprise romances) all bring party-based fantasy adventure to life on the Sword Coast. Sweeping high-fantasy frolic.




THE FPS EVICTIONS

Things are starting to come to a boil. Civility is starting to break down. Quake 3 Arena has been dancing around in Unreal Tournament's finest frocks singing, "Don't You Think I'm Sexy?" Ignoring the Rod Stewart angle, UT responded by going for Q3A's railgun, laying it across her lap and accidentally firing it once into a nearby fairy floss stand, "Sorry, I was just looking for the second mode of fire... or anything

remotely new about this gun..." Just as it looked like Q3A and UT were going to throw down Half-Life's Gordon Freeman stepped forward, lowered his glasses and said, "Looks are great, guns are nifty but, really, we all know it's about the story..." before diving for cover.

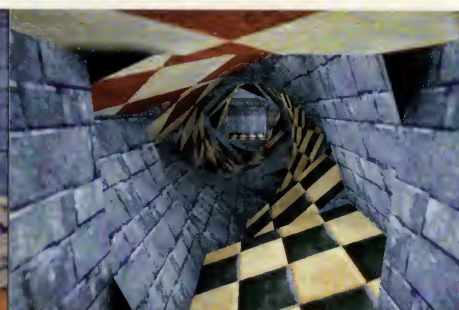
15	SCORE 86% DEVELOPER PLANET MOON RELEASED 2001 REVIEWED PCPP #58	GIANTS <p>Play a 100' giant, a five-man squad game or control an ultra-powerful (but alone and diminutive) sorceress all in one game, seeing the story unfold from each point of view and through each massively different play style. Scale has never been illustrated like this. Multiplayer is mindboggling. Imagine an angry skyscraper vs. a tiny Lady of the Lake vs. swarming Power Rangers and you're almost there. Staggering.</p>	
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14		ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON <p>Alluring blend of management and building (not to mention designing) the hugest toys in the world! The objectives are all well and good but the search for entertainment perfection will drag you back time and again as you try to blend theme, decoration, attractions, gimmicky stalls and interlocking rollercoasters into something that would make Disney blush. Beware the inner child!</p>	SCORE 93% DEVELOPER MICROPROSE RELEASED 1999 REVIEWED PCPP #36
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13	SCORE 95% DEVELOPER RELIC ENTERTAINMENT RELEASED 1999 REVIEWED PCPP #33	HOMEWORLD <p>Effortlessly taught us what it truly meant to be a 3D game, showing us what combat in space would like on scale that still makes gamers marvel. The exhaust trails and weapon fire made this look less like a game and more like a vast and beautiful space opera with sweeping movements, moments of stillness and calm and then crescendos of sound and explosions. Artfully constructed look into the future of sci-fi gaming.</p>	
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SHOGUN <p>"How victory may be produced for them out of the enemy's own tactics - that is what the multitude cannot comprehend." - Sun Tzu</p> <p>"I am learning their ways but the torch I follow only illuminates the path of confusion." "There is talk of controlling re-spawn sites but I do not see the vast importance of trout. There is wide condemnation of camping but surely</p> <p>there is a time and place. Many have recommend breaking crates. I do not understand this, either. Crates do not appear on a battlefield unless placed there. If they shall be trapped. If placed there by our forces surely the enemy shall seize them or it would be wise to use the item from the outset. I must return to study them, but surely this shall be a bitter harvest ...</p>	12 	QUAKE 3 ARENA <p>Frenzied gaming pushing the pace of play to a new level. Easy online options made Q3 extremely accessible, while its speed, well-balanced no-nonsense weapons and uber-functional maps continued to appeal to old hands. Exquisitely distilled FPS play.</p>	SCORE 93% DEVELOPER ID SOFTWARE RELEASED 1999 REVIEWED PCPP #45
		11 SCORE 98% DEVELOPER VALVE SOFTWARE RELEASED 1998 REVIEWED PCPP #31	HALF-LIFE <p>A couple of years ago the popularity of deathmatching made a lot of people fear for the singleplayer FPS. Half-Life showed them. With its spine-tingling tension, breathtaking AI and compelling nature, Half-Life single-handedly re-invented story-based FPS solo-play. Valve raised the bar.</p>

10	<p>SCORE 90%</p> <p>DEVELOPER MAXIS</p> <p>RELEASED 2000</p> <p>REVIEWED PCPP #47</p>	<p>THE SIMS</p> <p>The attraction of fostering a little Sim through everyday life, very much like our own, is hard to describe. Maybe it's the fact we understand all the problems and appreciate the rewards. Maybe it's because we're all frustrated interior designers. Whatever it, is it's delightful.</p>		<p><Voting Subsystem: The Sims 7%... 6% ... 5% ... Hostile Waters 10% ... 9% Counter Strike 11%... 10%... 9%> Hmmm... skip down... <System Shock 2 16%... 17%... 18%... 19%...> It's that egomaniacal AI rigging the results. Now that's my kind of evil genius! It only showed up because someone spiked the signal from the inside. Who's still in there who could out-fox Shodan's 'net-fu? Hmmm...</p>
9		<p>HOSTILE WATERS</p> <p>This game fuses action and RTS into something new and requiring a grandiose buzzword. Seamlessly blends resource management and unit design with firstperson combat befitting a dedicated sim game. Be impressed.</p>	<p>SCORE 91%</p> <p>DEVELOPER RAGE SOFTWARE</p> <p>RELEASED 2001</p> <p>REVIEWED PCPP #61</p>	<p>What's this? A pirate signal travelling out of the house on a digital video feed? Let me see... <David Wildgoose ... Editor ... Machine 14-02X, junction B ... Anthony Fordham ... Deputy Editor ... Machine 14-02Y, junction B ... John Dewhurst ... Description Denied ... Machine 14-01C, junction B ... Timothy C. Best ... Top 100 writer ... Machine 01-01b, junction Wa1 ... connected ... transmitting ...> Ello, ello ... what 'ave we 'ere?</p>
8	<p>SCORE 90%</p> <p>DEVELOPER CS-TEAM/VALVE</p> <p>RELEASED 2000</p> <p>REVIEWED PCPP #55</p>	<p>COUNTER-STRIKE</p> <p>Counter-Strike took Half-Life and turned it into a team game revolving around the tense and explosive encounters between terrorists and counter-terrorist squads. Varied objectives, the need for great stealth, precision and coordination all make this game mind-numbingly addictive, and touches like buying equipment from money earned in-mission take this to another level. The most played team FPS on the 'net for a reason.</p>		
7		<p>SYSTEM SHOCK 2</p> <p>Distant echoes, a virtually omniscient AI as calmly insane as it is brilliant, and the corpse of a claustrophobic ship surrounding you all build an unmistakable and consummate atmosphere that will give you chills late into the night. The freedom to tackle problems in the way that suits you best and the delicate blend of action, RPG and problem solving make this unnaturally good.</p>	<p>SCORE 98%</p> <p>DEVELOPER IRRATIONAL</p> <p>RELEASED 1999</p> <p>REVIEWED PCPP #42</p>	
6	<p>SCORE 92%</p> <p>DEVELOPER LIONHEAD</p> <p>RELEASED 2001</p> <p>REVIEWED PCPP #60</p>	<p>BLACK & WHITE</p> <p>Incredibly hyped god game which fell short of many people's stratospheric expectations. Others played B&W for what it was and were astounded by the intelligence and personality of their creature avatar, the reactive villagers and the hidden interface that becomes so intuitive you get put out when you try web browsing and it doesn't work. Divine game which will amaze if you give it a chance.</p>		



THIEF: THE DARK PROJECT

SCORE 95% **DEVELOPER** LOOKING GLASS
RELEASED 1998 **REVIEWED** PCPP#33

This is one of games with so many subtle features that all sift together so cunningly you'll actually occasionally be jolted out of the game by the realisation of how stunningly ingenious it all is. The rich mood, the intricate missions and intrigue make you want to stand still, sweat beading, for minutes on end planning the perfect crime and waiting for the perfect moment. In an age of Serious Sam constant action, that this game actually induced this much patience points to masterful design and a richly rewarding gameplay dynamic. The Dark Projects makes you become the master thief lead character in a way no prior game has managed.

TRIBES 2

5

This is going to be a cakewalk, people. Tribes Kucha and Ogakor are behind in the technical stakes and don't even have rudimentary power armour. Even if we somehow were overcome by fumes, like one of the Kucha, our armour would protect us from any open flame below napalm intensity. We may have some problems with the water events, but that's what scouts

TRIBES 2

SCORE 93% **DEVELOPER** DYNAMIX
RELEASED 2001 **REVIEWED** PCPP #60

Dynamix weighed up Tribes's flaws, had a look at the competition and then managed to fit almost every FPS wish list item clogging the 'net into one game. Tribes 2 is a visual feast, with maps that can take five minutes to walk across, six gameplay-adding vehicles (three of them air) to pilot or gun, every conceivable team game type and a command circuit which allows one player to see a top-down strategic overview and take control of a mission in realtime. All the features, vast depth, built-in accessibility and an excellent communication model make this the most complete team FPS ever.

4

are for right? We have them outgunned and out numbered ... What do you mean this isn't Survivor? Why has that floating skull been making us all eat swamp eels and stand on poles, then? Okay Tribes, new mission: wise-ass skull extraction. Lock and load.





AGE OF EMPIRES 2

SCORE 94% **DEVELOPER** ENSEMBLE STUDIOS

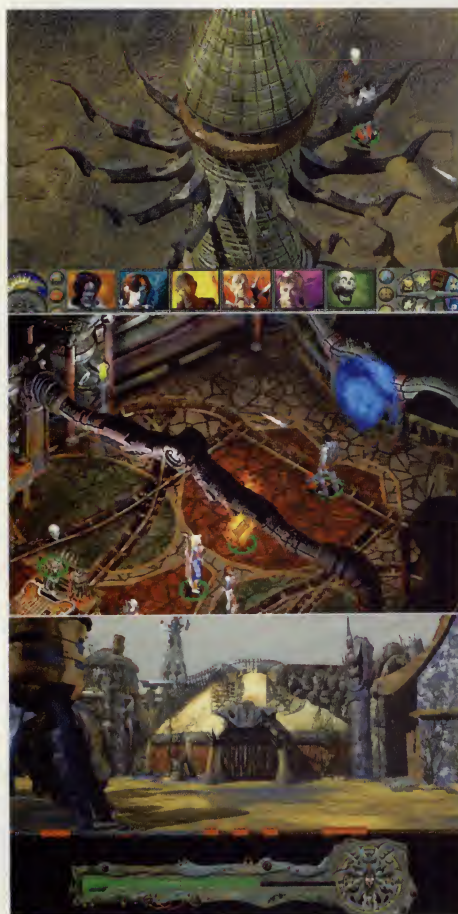
RELEASED 1999 **REVIEWED** PCPP #42

3

A lot of talent went into Age of Kings. Bruce Shelley worked on Civ 2 with Sid Meier, Sandy Petersen worked on Doom, Quake and designed the pen-and-paper Call of Cthulhu RPG. All of these design skills were pushed to their limit with AoK to produce a game that looked simple and inviting on the surface but with time got more intricate and complex the further you dug.

The different civilisations all offer very different strengths, the walls and buildings offer fortress-like protection or bottle up the unwary and the art direction, quality vocals, extended campaigns and neat extras all scream simple elegance. Simply grand.

Once he gets back from taking advantage of his new-found popularity with the online undead set, he better start looking for some new teeth.



2

PLANESCAPE: TORMENT

SCORE 91% **DEVELOPER** BLACK ISLE

RELEASED 1999 **REVIEWED** PCPP #46

The dimension of Planescape was always one of the more unusual and uncharacteristically abstract places in usually hack'n'slash Advanced Dungeons & Dragons. It was a place where concepts walked and ideas could kill. Torment brings this world to life with its tale of the Nameless One's search for definition and revelation of the mysterious relationships he's forged over countless forgotten lives.

Replaying the game takes you different places as you remember different lives offering great depth and from top to toe the game is crafted with rare attention to detail. Deep, fascinating and a perfect example as game design as an art form. Treat yourself.

NAMELESS ONE

"What can change the nature of a man?" I now know. Unscrupulous editing by television executives. I didn't even know I was in this house until they pull me out and I saw all the clips of me being all brooding and intense on the big screen. I'm actually pretty funny, you know. You should have seen me... ah... never mind. Morte told me Planescape just does this sometimes.



DEUS EX

SCORE 98% **DEVELOPER** ION STORM **RELEASED** 2000 **REVIEWED** PCPP #51

As a games journo you become fairly jaded. You hear about all these games that promise to get out of your machine and make you coffee. You are occasionally dumbstruck by fancy graphics but dumb is soon followed by your usual smart and you wonder why the other elements of the game aren't nearly as special.

You decide you want a game that is like being immersed in another world with the freedom and flexibility to let you do what you want, while still having a compelling story so you don't get bored and you don't want to get lost.

Well, Warren Spector's opus comes as close to this as any game. It takes the idea of presenting a problem and letting you solve it as you wish to a new level, with multiple entry points and situations which change depending on how you have got there.

Combinations of skills and nano-augmentations have a huge effect on how you traverse the web upon web of conspiracies which lie at the heart of the game, and every action seems to have repercussions. Deus Ex captures the feel of real cause and effect and wraps it in a neon wash future of Blade Runner-esque Hong Kong markets, and dystopic trips to Liberty Island.

Atmosphere, story, and character development aside, the strongest feature of the game is that there isn't always a best way to go, no matter how specific your skills. That's a beautiful thing because it means every mission is a gamble and you have the feeling that you're trying something new and surprising every time you tackle an obstacle. There is no, not-so-subtle railroading, with a sign saying combat machine left and security specialist right ... which makes literally all the options come alive and hum.

For this and so much more, Deus Ex you are still the greatest.

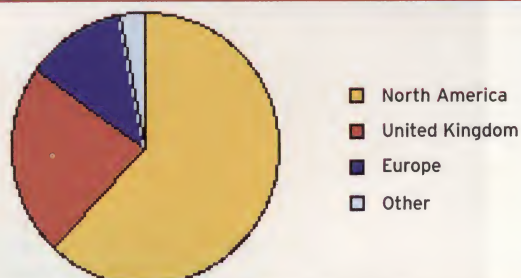
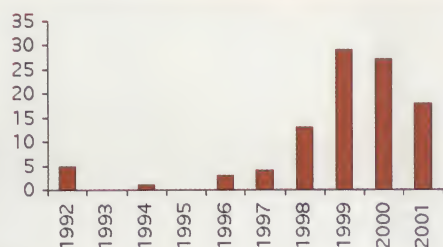




It's official. 1999 was the greatest year for games - ever. And in one quick statistical measurement we put an end to the debate of whether games are as good as they used to be (see Roundtable p26). Sure, the quality dipped slightly during 2000, but only to a small degree. But the fact that 2001 is barely half over and has already managed two-thirds of 1999's representation is a clear indication of a trend toward increasingly good games.

Nevertheless it's pleasing to see an impressive five titles surviving the years since 1992. In terms of today's technology, these games are rubbish, but their great gameplay still manages shines through. Yet it is somewhat disappointing to note that a major part of the reason why these games remain on our list is because no one has successfully updated that gameplay, at least not to the same level of quality. We'd love to see new versions of *Underworld* and *Star Control 2* knock these pensionable veterans out of the chart next year.

Speaking of next year, we'd also like to see a better showing for non-American games. Unsurprisingly, North American developers and publishers dominate this year's Top 100. The US is the largest market in the world, but it surely has more than its fair share here. Expect to see a stronger showing from Europe and "Others" next year, and particularly keep an eye on those Koreans.





OZ DEVELOPER PROFILE

#3: AURAN

IN THE THIRD PART OF OUR SERIES ON AUSTRALIAN PC GAME DEVELOPERS, TIMOTHY C. BEST REMAINS IN QUEENSLAND IN AN EFFORT TO SHOW THAT IT'S NOT ALL SUN, SURF AND SAND. AURAN IS AMPLE EVIDENCE THAT SOMETIMES OUR NORTHERN FRIENDS CAN GO A BIT MEDIEVAL AS WELL...

In this fairy-tale world of ideas and concepts brought to life by lightning streams of 1s and 0s, fools' gold and the real thing can be separated by a decision.

Just ask Looking Glass about this industry that seems to follow inexplicable trends and rules more akin to something out of Lewis Carroll's imagination than the 'real' world.

If you always want to hit the real thing, and keep away from the iron sulphate, you need a game plan like spun gold: brilliant and bold but able to bend like a reed.

This is Auran's story.

PANNING FOR AURAN

When Dark Reign was marched around the traps, with Activision the brightly coloured and loud flag bearer, people realised that there was gold there. It was, in a word, auric.

It not only contained gold, but imaginative features - like waypoints (this was 1997), troops who could disguise themselves as trees for stealth and assassination missions, the ability to steal plans and then manufacture enemy vehicles as well as solid gameplay and story - lead me to believe that it also was of gold.

Where to look for such a company but the Gold Coast? Brisbane maybe. A company named Auran. A company that seemed to come out of nowhere or, more precisely, that came out of a New Year's resolution to "put your money where your mouth is" and actually make a better strategy game.

Greg Lane, Auran's CEO and the man with the mouth and the money to back it, says: "The timing was right, both in the games industry in general and in setting up a studio in Brisbane."

The decision was far from a flippant one, Lane saw a hole in a market, did his research and then moved. He teamed up with another businessman, Graham Edelsten, and set about putting together a team.

"There were a number of people locally with game development experience looking for

opportunities, so we were able to set up a very talented and keen team that all had the same goal of creating a number one title," he says. In 1995 they formed Auran.

Since the whole scheme had spun out of a discussion of the state of RTS games like WarCraft and C&C, it was an RTS that was to be Auran's first project. The prototype game was pitched as Corporations and was shown to a number of the real money people: the publishers.

It was Activision who came to the table. They added their experience to the mix and alterations were made to the original plan. Without fuss Corporations became Dark Reign. Flex like a reed.

With the backing and loudspeaker effect of Activision, Dark Reign managed to be one of the most impressive games of the 1997 E3, went on to sell around 700,000 copies and was voted by many as the strategy game of the year.

In fact, Dark Reign was so good that Activision bought the rights to the Tactics Engine it used and poached several people to work on the sequel at Pandemic. Actually, if you look around the Australian games scene, particularly around Bris-Vegas, that most of the companies contain a little gold in the people department.

Losing people and not being able to follow its debut hit with a sequel (as Pandemic came into being to do it at Activision) could have dropped Auran in the games wilderness, lost. But there was a plan in place.

DON'T PREDICT, CREATE

Auran would need a new property as well as a new engine. Before Dark Reign had sold its first copy, Auran had secured the rights to N. Robin Crossby's world of Hårn, a pen and paper RPG which had an impressive following and over 25 years worth of back story.

Not bad going for a new developer with the first wrapper yet to be pulled off its first game. Lane makes out that this wasn't the feat it

Company Motto: Don't predict it. Create it.

Location: Brisbane, Queensland

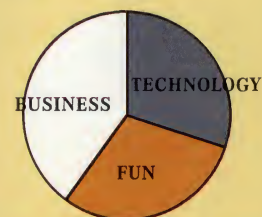
Founded: 1995

URL: www.auran.com

Auran Identities: Greg Lane (CEO); Graham Edelsten (Chief Financial Officer)

Best Development Advice Given To You: Surround yourself with talented people that all have the same goal of creating the best game ever made.

Pie Graph:



seems.

"We rang Columbia Games and asked," he says with a smile. That simple.

An engine would probably prove a little trickier. A likely solution would be to licence one, or to start immediately on the Hårn game, rushing out an engine at a pace to keep up with the game. There was another option: build an engine as a product itself. Work on the S.A.G.E. engine began and Auran signed publishing deals with EA for their Hårn games just as Dark Reign was starting to knock people's socks off in late 1997.

The first game for EA was to be an RPG, Hårn: Bloodline, and the second a massively multiplayer version of the popular game. Things were looking good. EA was onboard, the engine was coming along and Bloodline was scheduled for a 1999 release.

Behind the scenes, the plan was still ticking along. If S.A.G.E. was a product, maybe it could be a product that would benefit everyone. It could even be good for the industry. In 1999 this idea turned into one of Auran's biggest coups, securing a grant of a little over \$2 million from the Australian government to

After Hårn, Auran has directed its attention to recreating the Arthurian legends with Excalibur





Handbag night at the Camelot discotheque!



develop S.A.G.E.

The end of 1999 came around, and while working at Australian PC Gamer - which during that very issue suffered what we'll call a fatal exception - I managed to get a screen of Bloodlines with a beautiful shot of open landscape and a character on a wall with a torch casting cool shadows. It was late but seemed to be coming along.

FIN DE MILLENNIUM

2000 was a rough year for PC games. Console games had sales that dwarfed those of PCs, and with the shadow of the PS2 the whole industry was hushed. The S.A.G.E. engine was still far from ready and Bloodlines wasn't to be seen.

Here's where Auran bent like the willow. Instead of forcing out a costly mistake, it went back to business ideas and started on a smaller niche project.

"A narrow focus is a good thing to have, but we have looked outside the traditional genres in which to put that focus, particularly into untapped markets," says Lane.

"We believe that just because a market is niche, it doesn't mean that it's small. We have found that catering to these largely ignored

niche markets can generate a lot of interest."

Auran began its Koolthingz line of electronic models and games, which took its cue from the collector card phenomenon that was sweeping the world. Trainz was their first project to hit the streets from the renamed S.A.G.E. engine, now known as Auran Jet.

"I had a model train set as a kid, so I had an interest in collecting trains as a hobby," says Lane. "I realised that there are many people who also share this interest. When we took a closer look at the model train and rail industry, we soon realised that it is massive and that there are literally millions of devotees all over the world."

Since launch a thriving online community has built up around this unique series of collectors trains with each model being numbered and representing real, unique, trains.

Hârn: Bloodline disappeared off the map as well, and to the world it appeared that Auran didn't have a major project. Rumours sprang up that they had to concentrate on the Jet engine to meet their grant requirements, and the games had to be shelved. Outsiders didn't know another game was in the works.

BEND LIKE THE WILLOW

It seemed that Hârn was going to be a slow battle.

"Honestly, it is has been tough," Lane admits. "Our aim has been to broaden the scope of the product and grow the market. Hârn has many loyal and purist disciples, that have been using the product for 20 years or more, so we have ruffled a few feathers by taking a fresh approach to material."

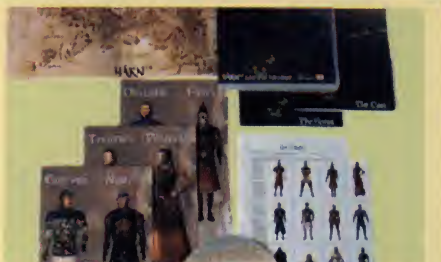
"However, increasingly, the Hârn community are welcoming the additional content that we are providing and would like to see the product they love gain greater market recognition."

This gives an idea about where Auran was in late 2000 when Bloodlines disappeared off the map. Their engine wasn't ready and their big licence didn't quite have mass appeal nor the support of hardcore fans. Many developers would have been in trouble, but here's how Auran bent like the willow.

Instead of bringing out a major 3D game that could prove a costly mistake, they went for a much more low-key approach and offered themselves up as people there to help the existing Hârn community by bringing it to the digital age. Early 2001 they set up the Project Hârn website, a place to become an online hub of activity, with new features, characters, spells and so on. They also started on a series of Digitally Enhanced adventure modules to help Hârnmasters run their pen-and-paper games with 3D maps, 3D representations of key areas, a nicely typed adventure and instant access to required rules. They weren't taking over and making their version of things, they were helping Crossby tell his game's stories - and making it more accessible to beginners.

As the PC industry started to bounce back in 2001, as people realised that there will always be

Aura, n, pl. auras, aurea 1. a distinctive air, atmosphere, character, etc: an aura of culture Auric, adj, of or containing gold. [L aurum gold + ic] -an, a suffix meaning: 1. 'Belonging to', 'pertaining or relating to', 'adhering to' and commonly expressing connection with a place, person, leader, class, order, sect, system, doctrine serving to form adjectives, many of which are used as nouns [L -ânus; replacing ME -ain, -en, from OF] From The Compact Macquaire Dictionary, 1994





I think I can, I think I can, I think I can, etc...



a place for PC games, and as Auran Jet neared completion, Auran announced it did have a game in the works: Excalibur.

When asked why Arthurian over Hårn, Lane explains: "Primarily it was a market awareness issue. People the world over know the legend of Excalibur so it makes it easier for an audience to have an instant understanding of the premise of the game."

It also let him directly translate any preliminary work done for the Hårn games into the new one as both were games set in a similar medieval England.

AURAN JET

Auran Jet is pretty special. It's special not just because of the technology but because of how Auran is using it. Although it's still in beta form, Auran has had over 7000 unique downloads of their engine. They are letting people use it for free. A one-off charge applies

If the games are set to make money, Auran gets a cut. If they don't, at least more people have tried their hands and they have learnt a little something that might make them a success next time. It also means there will be a great talent pool of people who know its engine.

Auran helps the community and raises its own profile. It also makes a great story to attract games media to Excalibur and the tale of Auran Jet. It's a win, win, win proposition.

GOLDEN MEAN

Auran has managed to put itself in a great position through making some smart moves and flexing into areas that most developers would not. When they lost the ability to make a sequel to their hit debut they were one step ahead and secured Hårn. When Hårn was hard to crack they moved from making a 3D Hårn game to building a Hårn following by enhancing the pen-and-paper game and becoming a storehouse of

options which followed the marketing maxim "It's all about choosing your customer, narrowing your focus and dominating the market," that Lane quotes when talking about his "Don't predict the future, create it" approach.

Now that their engine is starting to make waves, and the PC market is looking a bit healthier, Auran is finally pulling out all the stops with Excalibur to show the world what this Golden boy can do.

INSTEAD OF A MAJOR 3D GAME AURAN OFFERED TO HELP THE EXISTING HARN COMMUNITY BY BRINGING IT TO THE DIGITAL AGE

only if the game goes commercial.

This is a good move in terms of public relations and fostering a community, as well making commercial sense. Lane knew this all along: "I would really love to see garage developers use Auran Jet to get a start in the games industry."

"Currently, it is difficult and costly to get a demo together to take to publishers, so if Auran Jet can help this process for some developers, it would be very satisfying. On the commercial side, the cost of some of the well-known engines is prohibitive, so there was room in the market for a more accessible product."

new material. They didn't even waste any of the 3D game they had written; they translated valuable work across into a game world that made more sense to use as a flagship title to show the world what they, and their engine can do.

When they lost the Tactics Engine at the same time as the rights to do Dark Reign 2, they started work on an engine with a noble and clever business idea behind it, which ended up winning them a seven-digit grant from the government and good press.

When the games market looked a bit shaky they developed alternate and cheaper game

AURAN JET



This is a world-class development engine, which has cost around \$4 million to develop. Currently it is Windows-only but it has been designed to be platform neutral, so Auran will release support for Linux, Xbox and PS2.

It supports multi-resolution mesh technology, 3D sound, day and night cycles with weather effects, comes with extensive AI routines (which should be pretty decent considering Dark Reign), a particle effects library, integrated developer tools, dynamic scene balancing, multi-threaded application support and a bunch of other technical features that will only mean something to you if you know a lot more about games development than this humble hired pen.

Check it all out at www.auran.com/jet/default.htm

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It turns great games into an experience.

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Vitesse Z

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Thermosonic ThermoEngine
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Samsung 32X/12R/8RW CDRW
Soundblaster Live!
Creative FPS1500 4.1 Speakers
Netcomm 56K Fax/Modem
Inwin 506 Midi-tower
Mitsubishi 104Key KB
Microsoft Wheelmouse Optical
Microsoft Windows ME
1 Year Onsite Warranty*

Step 1. How fast do you want to go

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AMD Athlon 1GHz DDR	\$1750
AMD Athlon 1.2GHz DDR	\$1799
AMD Athlon 1.33GHz DDR	\$1888
AMD Athlon 1.4GHz DDR	\$1969

Step 2. Choose your video card

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Hercules 64MB 3D Prophet 4500	\$151
Gainward 64MB GeForce2 Pro	\$290
Asus 32Mb GeForce2 Deluxe	\$408
Prolink 64MB GeForce3	\$418
Hercules 64MB GeForce3	\$819
	\$933

Step 3. Choose your monitor

Hitachi CM625 17" Monitor (Flat)	\$542
Hitachi CM772 19" Monitor (Flat)	\$904
Hitachi CML150XW 15" TFT	\$1,114
Hitachi CML17XE 17" TFT	\$2,327
Philips 107E21 17" Monitor	\$361
Philips 107P10 17" Monitor (Flat)	\$581
Philips 109P20 19" Monitor (Flat)	\$1,094
Philips 201P10 21" Monitor (Flat)	\$2,029
Samsung 753DF 17" Monitor (Flat)	\$473
Sony CPD-E220 17" Monitor	\$618
Sony CPD-G420 19" Monitor	\$1,230
Sony CPD-G520 21" Monitor	\$2,054

Vitesse DDR

Specifications

Epox 8K7A+ AMD 761 Motherboard
Thermosonic ThermoEngine
256MB PC2100 DDR SDRAM
2x 20GB 7200rpm ATA100 HDD
Samsung 32X/12R/8RW CDRW
Hercules GameTheatre XP
Creative FPS1500 4.1 Speakers
Netcomm 56K Fax/Modem
Inwin 508 Midi-tower (300W PSU)
Microsoft Internet KB
Microsoft Wheelmouse Optical
Microsoft Windows ME
1 Year Onsite Warranty*

Step 1. How fast do you want to go

AMD Duron 850MHz	\$2175
AMD Athlon 1GHz DDR	\$2276
AMD Athlon 1.2GHz DDR	\$2321
AMD Athlon 1.33GHz DDR	\$2410
AMD Athlon 1.4GHz DDR	\$2479

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Mitsubishi DV17NF 17" Monitor (Flat)	\$574
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IN REVIEW

The most authoritative reviews around

GAMES



As I do my daily rounds at the PCPP forums (pcpowerplay.com.au/forums), it strikes me that we are a disparate bunch. Contrary to popular belief, the Australian gamer is not necessarily young or male. But more obvious is the fact that two gamers who are superficially similar can have drastically different tastes.

This is why PC gamers should feel blessed. We have such a wide palette of gaming choices to cater to our every whim. While other games platforms have only narrow variety, we have all manner of satisfaction on command. And despite this fact, do we still have the gall to complain? To criticise? Well of course we do.

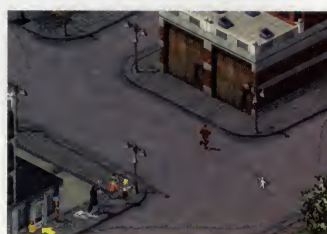
In our continuing efforts to bring you the entire world of gaming, we made sure we had some lemons. Expectation failing, thy name is Gangsters 2. Turn to p74 to see Mr Cottee bat this soft target around some. For those who strive for mediocrity, play Merchant Prince 2 or Offroad Redneck Racing. If you really hate yourself, try the Elite Force add-on.

All bad news? Hardly. For those starved of some decent RPG fun, look no further than Arcanum. Our very editor has stepped out of semi-retirement to take up the reviewing challenge (Hey! - Ed). Guns and magic, witty repartee, we can't get enough of this little champion. Dost thou accept thine quest? When it's so Fallout, I'm scared of being attacked by starving gypsies, of course I accept. Let's see what else we have...

Operation Flashpoint has blown the PowerPlay collective back several paces, with the infamous mantra "Game of the Year" passing at least two sets of lips. This is it, friends. For the finest "peace-keeping" action this side of the West Bank, look no further than Flashpoint.

Two Gold games in a month - better than recent issues. We don't give gold lightly, so you can be sure it's fresh. Super fresh, even.

johnd@next.com.au



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THE PCPP REVIEW SCORING SYSTEM

90+	Gold Award. A classic, everyone will love this game.
89-80	A strong title that's hard to fault. But perhaps not the best in its field.
79-60	Competent and playable. For fans of the genre.
59-40	Decidedly average, probably boring.
39-0	A dog. Bad, shamelessly unoriginal, cheap and horrible. Avoid.
Need	The minimum requirements to get the game running at a playable speed.
Want	The ideal system requirements for the game.
For	The major reasons why you'll like the reviewed game.
Against	The major reasons why you won't.

GAME OF THE MONTH COMPETITION!

Microsoft



Microsoft wants you to play Operation Flashpoint the way it was meant to be played. As such, we have been supplied with one Intellimouse Optical to give away. Just answer this question for your chance to win!

WHAT DOES NATO STAND FOR AND WHO ARE ITS MEMBER NATIONS?

Write your answer on the back of an envelope, addressed to: **Microsoft Game of the Month, PC PowerPlay**, 78 Renwick Street, Redfern NSW 2016

ARCANUM

Discover a whole new world of roleplaying



DETAILS

DEVELOPER

Troika Games

PUBLISHER

Sierra

DISTRIBUTOR

Vivendi

PRICE

\$89.95

RATING

TBA

NEED

PII-300
64MB RAM

WANT

PIII-500
128MB RAM

MULTIPLAYER

Yes

AVAILABLE

Mid August



REALITY BITES

In Tarant, the leading industrialist is a chap named Gilbert Bates. His main competitor, albeit struggling by comparison, is Cedric Appleby. They used to be friends, but had a falling out over the invention of a particular technology. Take a closer look at their names and decipher which real world figures Troika is describing in gentle parody.

In the city of Tarant, one of the major ports in southern Arcanum, there is a street called Avellone. Roleplaying aficionados will nod in recognition of this reference to Chris Avellone, Lead Designer of Planescape: Torment. The connection is apt; Arcanum very much follows in the Torment tradition.

When determining the worth of a roleplaying game, judgment must be passed on several factors: the ability of the player to create and mould a unique character, the level of interaction within the gameworld, and the freedom granted to find your own path throughout that world. On all these counts, Arcanum - like Torment - excels.

In an RPG, the quality of the graphics matters not in the slightest. If it did then Arcanum would barely register amid a fantasy landscape dominated by the towering creations of Blizzard and Black Isle. So let's ignore the uniformly bland architectural aesthetic and rather awkward animation that constitute the towns and

people of Arcanum, and instead just feel that depth. I promise there won't be a sentence beginning "Visually,..." in this review.

Ideological conflict

The world of Arcanum is a curious mix of established fantasy tradition and 19th century technology, both fact and fiction. The game's subtitle, Of Steamworks and Magick Obscura, hints at the conflicting ideologies upon which Arcanum society is founded. Gun Shoppes are located across the road from Panarii temples; blacksmiths rub shoulders with conjurers; taverns trade next door to newspaper offices; adventurers are just as likely to be armed with a falchion as a flintlock pistol.

Essentially, Arcanum exists as two worlds within one, where magick and technology vie in a delicately balanced

equilibrium. Just as prosperous cities are those that embrace both worlds, so can your player character. After all, as Ke'ree Melange (one of the predefined player characters) says, "If you can't live in two worlds, then you're obviously trapped in one."

When creating a character in Arcanum, there are two options: pre-generated or

the magick/technology dualism is more than a backdrop for the world, it plays an intrinsic role in the gameplay

custom. The former is definitely for the novice roleplayer. Twelve diverse characters are available, spanning the full range of races, abilities and skills. Each also comes with an individual levelling up routine that automatically assigns skill points every time



DON'T EXERT YOURSELF

Departing from roleplaying convention, *Arcanum* introduces a character statistic called Fatigue. What it measures is self-evident, but its gameplay function requires explanation. Fatigue acts as the store of a character's energy. It depletes with the use of magick (similar to mana) and through physical over-exertion. Running in combat drains Fatigue, as does performing any action in a combat turn that over-reaches your action point limit. For example, to attack costs four APs, but you've only got two left. You can still make the attack but at the expense of Fatigue because you've over-extended yourself during that turn. When a character's Fatigue hits zero, he falls unconscious, meaning you can knock enemies out (rather than killing them) by using weapons that do Fatigue damage (i.e. maces, staffs, etc).

a new character level is attained. The reason Troika implemented this feature is clear once you take the plunge and create your own custom character.

Character creation is a complex process. Very complex. A whole slew of factors must be taken into account: eight ability scores, four sets of skills (with four skills in each subset for a total of sixteen), eight technological disciplines and sixteen spell colleges. Then there's gender and racial considerations, too, both of which impact ability scores. (See Creationism.)

Finally there's the option to choose a

character background, which again can affect abilities. These function similarly to the traits and perks in the *Fallout* games, and provide some semblance of meaning to the usually abstract set of character statistics. Choose 'Ran away with the circus' and you have a reason why your character is strong and dextrous, but dim-witted due to the lack of schooling. Choose 'Born under a sign' and you can understand why your character gains more critical hits (and misses!) than others in combat. The detail lavished here is indicative of the care and attention Troika has given to the game overall.

Steampowered

The magick/technology dualism in operation here does so much more than paint a backdrop for the world, it plays an intrinsic role in the gameplay. Much of the game's political intrigue is informed by this universal ideological conflict. The once great city of Dernholm lies in near ruin thanks to the king's rejection of technology. Meanwhile Tarant stands as a monument to the power of steam, due in large part to the invention of the steam engine by industrialist Gilbert Bates (*or did he?*). (See Reality Bites.)

Besides the typical RPG staple of Good and Evil, every character in the game is also placed on a spectrum measuring their magickal or technical aptitude. For player characters, position on this scale is determined by the skills you have chosen for them. The impact it has on the gameplay is both subtle and obvious; it rates how effectively characters can cast spells and use gadgets, but also how effective such things are when used against them.

CREATIONISM

Creating a character is a process fraught with tough decisions. After gender and racial modifiers are calculated, characters begin with a set of default ability scores and zero level skills. You then have a mere five points to allocate to anything you like, a further point each level and a bonus point every fifth level. Some skills have ability pre-requisites which only compounds the difficulty of deciding. You can even opt to increase hit points and fatigue levels instead of skills or abilities. Expect to spend plenty of time at this screen, stroking your chin and pondering the implications of it all.



The scenery can get quite pretty, but it plays a secondary role

In Arcanum the use of magick or technology seems almost like a matter of faith. The more you believe in one, the more power you can harness from it and the more powerfully it can affect you. The magickally-inclined might be able to conjure the most fearsome plague of insects, but its effect is significantly diluted if the spell's target scoffs at the mere thought of otherworldly power.

alternatives are always on offer, whether it's persuasion, deception, thievery or a brutal axe to the face

Conversely, the latter character's Looking Glass rifle stands every chance of misfiring if aimed at the former. The outcome of a pistol duel between two mages would be amusing to say the least.

In general terms, the net result of this scale is the elimination of the min/max school of roleplaying whereby players max out the skills their character will use while suffering no penalty for the skills they lack.

Here, a maxed out magick character will have his weaknesses exposed regularly, as will as tech-head. And of course, the jack-of-all-trades character reduces her weaknesses at the expense of having few genuine areas of strength. But the key is each type of character will be able to find their own solution to problems and, ultimately, a successful route through the game.

Gentle invitation

Roleplaying games always promise to let you play the way you want to. Arcanum is one of the rare occasions where this promise is delivered. Alternatives are always on offer, whether it's through persuasion, deception, thievery or a brutal axe to the face. Even something as mundane as healing a character can be achieved any number of ways: learn healing spells from the White Necromantic college, study Herbology and mix your own potions, pick the pocket of a priest, haggle with store owners to gain a cheaper price on salves or try your luck gambling for such wares. And that's without mentioning you can recruit a

follower who might have one or several of these skills himself.

At times it's a daunting experience, almost too overwhelming. There are so many skills to choose between, so many possible actions to take, that less seasoned roleplayers may well feel out of their depth. To assist somewhat, Arcanum eases the player gently into the story, sketching out the main quest yet inviting all manner of tangential excursions into subquests.

Proceedings commence with the crash of a zeppelin outside the small village of Shrouded Hills following an attack by airborne orcs. Far from having sprouted wings after centuries in a genetic cesspool, these orcs have managed to take to the skies courtesy of a squadron of steampunk biplanes. We're not in Tolkien's world any more, that's for sure.

In a minor nuisance, you happen to be a passenger on said zeppelin. In a minor miracle, you happen to be the only passenger to survive. The bodies of the other passengers (who, cleverly, are actually all the



I WILL FOLLOW

As in *Fallout*, *Arcanum* adopts a follower system rather than a party of characters. The player controls a single character who can recruit others along the way. These followers are semi-autonomous; you can instruct them but they do have some degree of free will. While this does engender them with considerable personality (they're not mere pack mules for your character), the lack of direct control can sometimes frustrate.

abovementioned pre-generated characters) are lying scattered around the wreckage. You can loot their belongings if you wish.

It slowly dawns that the orcs mounted the attack *because* you were a passenger. An elderly gnome (*or is he?*) hands you a ring, and with his last breath, tells of an Ancient Prophecy in which you will play a major part when it inevitably comes to fruition. Soon afterwards you are attacked by a suspicious fellow wearing a medallion

of the Molochean Hand cult. The orc raiders were wearing the very same medallion...

Matters of consequence

Everything becomes significantly more complicated from here on. You'll swiftly encounter necromancy, gangs of thieves, monopolistic practices reminiscent of the contemporary computer software business, bank robberies in broad daylight, stolen paintings, bitching upper class ladies, disrespectful archaeologists, union-baiting employers, racial and sexual discrimination, and an abundance of willing monsters to kill. But of course things are never quite as they seem in *Arcanum*.

At one point the opportunity arises to sell your story (as the only survivor of the zeppelin disaster) to a local newspaper. *Cheque book journalism* is alive and well in *Arcanum*, so the financial dividend is enticing. In addition, celebrity status is a sure way to increase favour with many of the townspeople. So should you do it? Well, maybe. It really depends on whether you

can afford the price of fame - not everyone who recognises you wants to be your friend. And with menacing cultists out to kill you, perhaps it wouldn't be wise to draw too much attention to yourself. But, hey, the decision is yours.

Thanks to the frequent presence of situations like this, *Arcanum* builds a world where player action actually matters. When you act, the world around you reacts. Plausible consequences are far more essential in the creation of a convincing gameworld than graphical beauty or realism. *Arcanum* doesn't need to rely on the latter because its world simulation compels like few others.

Troika has broken the Black Isle hegemony on the roleplaying genre. *Arcanum* offers a deep, immersive world, character differentiation on an unprecedented level, and intriguing quests galore. What more could you want from an RPG?

David Wildgoose

PCPP

FOR

- Immersive world
- Meaningful character choices
- Brilliant story

AGAINST

- Visually comma it's limited

OVERALL

The best roleplaying game since Torment

92%

OPERATION FLASHPOINT

Argh- Commie Nazis!

DETAILS

DEVELOPER

Bohemia Interactive

PUBLISHER

Codemasters

DISTRIBUTOR

Ozisoft

PRICE

\$89.95

RATING

MA 15+

NEED

PII-400, 64MB
RAM, 32MB
Videocard

WANT

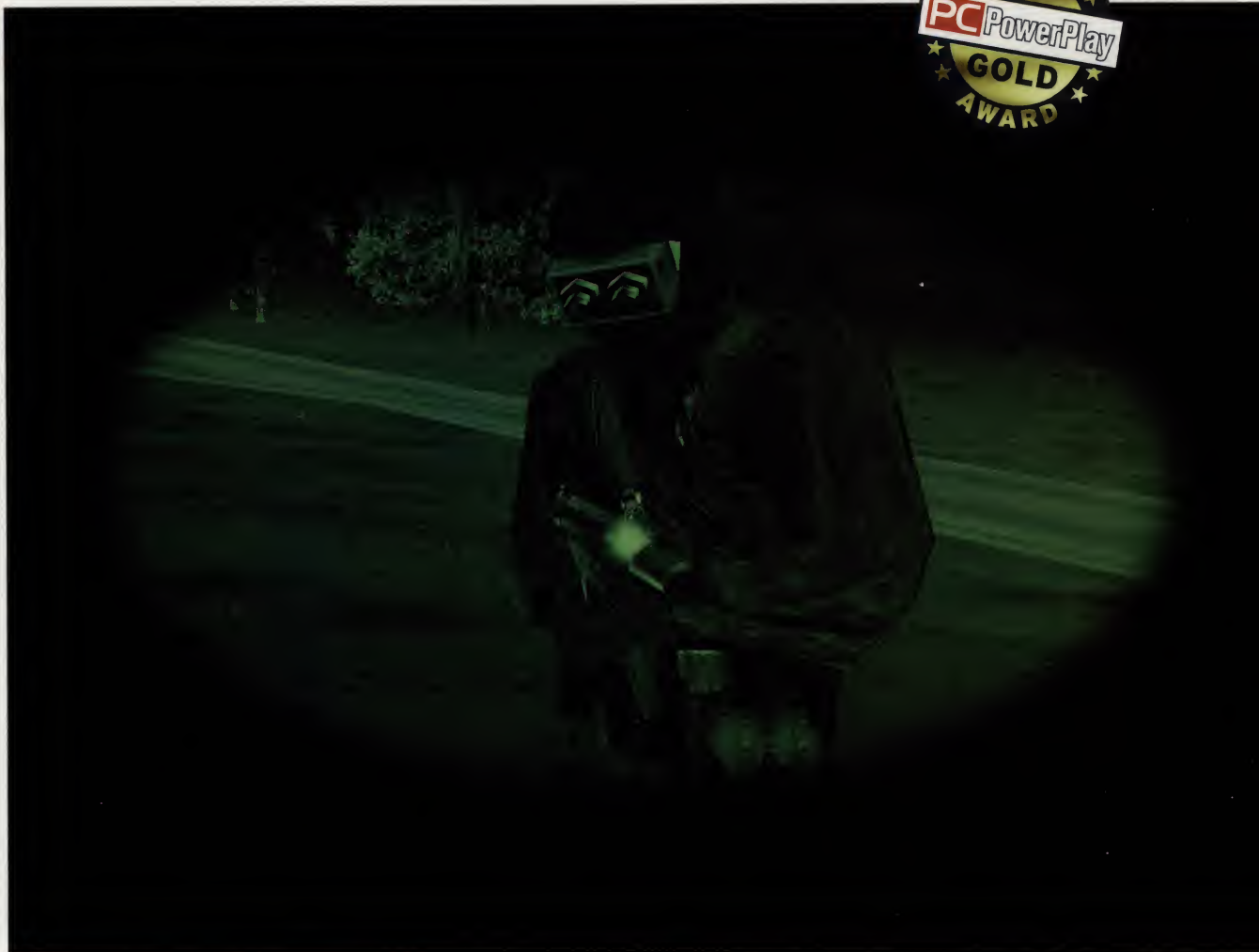
PIII-750, 128MB
RAM, 64MB
Videocard

MULTIPLAYER

1-32

AVAILABLE

Now



Western Civilisation has a lot going for it. When compared to any other civ in human history, we've got it sweet: democracy, personal freedom, high standards of living, literacy, lifespan, the lot. Looking from the inside out, things couldn't be better. But Western Civilisation is a hungry beast, covetous, militaristic, ruthless. To ensure our psychological well-being, we need a scapegoat to focus all our negative energy on, but never actually destroy. We need an enemy.

For the latter half of the 20th century, that enemy was the Russians. The competition did us a world of good, leading directly and indirectly to the development of satellite technology, the internet, GPS systems and so forth. Granted, we lived our lives under the constant threat of nuclear annihilation, but can you really imagine a world without Quake III? I think the survivors would envy the dead.

As a bonus, the good guys/bad guys

mentality spilled over into popular culture, giving us such cinematic masterworks as Rambo III and Red Dawn. Unfortunately, the videogames created with this mentality didn't get much more complex than Raid Over Moscow. By the time computer technology had caught up with the movies in terms of realism, the Red Menace was dead and buried.

Sure, the Yellow Peril is set to make a comeback, but it just isn't the same.

Back in the USSR

With Operation Flashpoint out in time for the tenth anniversary of the collapse of the Soviet Union, things seem grim. No matter! All we have to do is turn back the clock to 1985. The mid-80s: When there was a senile movie star in the white house, communists in the Kremlin, and the numerical superiority

of the Warsaw Pact forces was still a threat to NATO's high-tech edge.

For those too young to remember, this was as close to the brink of WWII as it's ever got, possibly worse than the Cuban Missile Crisis. With strategic warheads on both sides numbering in the tens of thousands, one false move could have sterilised the planet.

the most significant feeling you get from play is tension, knowing that every move could well be your last

The fate of Mankind rested on a knife-edge, and with the help of a hypothetical surge of Russian aggression, is yours to save.

You can think of it as Red Alert 3D, if you like. Only with more weapons and options, a longer campaign, a comprehensive mission editor built in, more features, hardcore appeal and the ability to network up to 30 persons in one skirmish. There's none of that

ONLINE

www.janes.com

You can trust Janes to bring you all the latest news from the world of high-tech weaponry

TRACTOR POWER!

It's always nice to see unnecessary levels of detail displayed in any video game, and Operation Flashpoint fulfils this parameter beautifully. If you happen to be strolling through a village, and a tractor catches your eye, then don't hold back, comrade! Step up to the Tractor Challenge and take it for a test drive. It's even got a nice red coat of paint...



Realism extends to the cross-hair; stand still and it's focused, run and firing becomes erratic



pesky Tiberium either; just potatoes and peasants, the way God intended.

Be all you can be

Operation Flashpoint may be the ultimate wargame. It spurns fanciful busywork like resource collection and base building for a real dose of combat. Rather than tooling around like Serious Sam, knowing that 100% health is but a medikit away, we have the novel concept of one shot kills. There is action, to be sure, but the most significant feeling you get from play is tension, knowing that every move could well be your last.

At its simplest, gameplay consists of a firstperson shooter in which you play an American soldier in a hypothetical conventional war with the Soviets. Weapons are treated realistically; you get your M16, perhaps a few grenades, and depending on the mission, maybe a one-shot light anti-tank weapon. All the standard control options are in place: strafing, running, and

so forth. You can also kneel and crawl along on your stomach.

You can expect to spend a lot of the game lying prone, wondering if there is red behind every bush. The graphics are serviceable, but while they're not amazing this isn't really an issue. The shrubbery may be built up of interlocking planes of greenery, but it's their ability to conceal the movement of your sinister commie foe that becomes important. Higher end machines can make better use of the engine, of course, and the way it's used works well on any system. The flavour of eastern Europe is simulated rather nicely, with rolling hills, ample foliage, and rambling villages to take cover in.

Big wars

The environments are huge, too. Each map is an island, reproduced in minute detail. Towns, roads, and proles all working together in an elaborate dance to convince you that the Malden Islands are a real place,

swarming with real communists. While the game isn't going to judge you, it should be remembered that inside every Slav there is an American trying to get out, so go easy. Besides, they look so real, you can almost feel their pain.

Yes, the attention to detail is impressive. The gun-sight in the middle of your soldier's view is made up of two elements, simulating the sights at each end of the gun. While moving they're out of synch; it's only while stationary that you can properly line up a shot. Ammo, like everything else is limited, so make it count. You can also shoulder your weapon and assign "salute" to the fire button; this is only recommended under strictly controlled conditions.

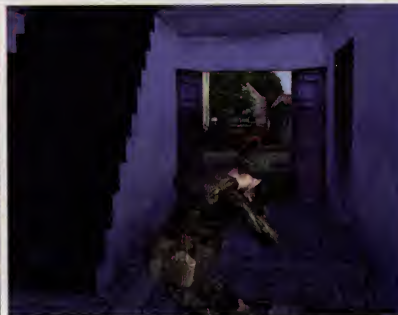
The audio aspect is amongst the best seen in a PC game. Those speaker setups with the little cubes hovering behind the player's head are finally good for something, as the battlefield is converted into a gripping 3D soundscape. Paying attention to the noises around you is crucial for survival; just



Flashpoint offers a huge number of vehicles to drive or pilot

80S ACTION

One can tell that the chaps at Bohemia Interactive have a sense of humour, as the interface is styled in a mid-1980s fashion. When you load up the mission editor, you're greeted with a green screen menu on an antiquated laptop. When you get your mission briefing, it's presented in a Filofax! It's all a delightful antidote to the cyber rubbish you see in most menus screens these days.



like in real life your vision is very limited, especially when lying prone. The paranoia is palpable; veterans of Skirmish will be familiar with this phenomena.

"Gather a strike team..."

Even the briefing screens are a treat. Together with your objectives and equipment load-out, there is a versatile map of the area you'll be attacking. It's fully zoom-able, with all the waypoints and such, and also shows all the contours of the

limit. Every cold war combat vehicle imaginable is playable in Flashpoint, from tanks to gunboats to helicopter gunships. You can perform a solo operation, or work as part of a team, either as a grunt or a leader. The campaign included with the game has ample opportunities for advancement; put in the time and you could make Colonel.

Vehicle controls are simplified, but not simplistic. When piloting a Cobra, for instance, you don't have to worry about rotor pitch or any such rubbish. There's enough momentum in the beast to give you that simulation feel, but only a handful of controls. You can fly as either pilot or gunner, and switch explicit control between the two at any time. Even though helicopter control is only one small part of the game, it represents the most entertaining gunship fun since the old Microprose classic Gunship. Nothing beats popping up to a column of red armour and letting rip with the Hellfires before they know what's hit them.

In fact, Operation Flashpoint makes

several other abandonware candidates obsolete. The PT boat action packs in all the thrills from the AT stalwart Gunboat, and M1 Tank Platoon can rest in peace now that a superior done is on the stands. With the military simulation industry in peril, Flashpoint is a beacon of hope for war-heads everywhere.

Long live the fighters!

The level of detail presented by the in-game engine is such that the use of movie files for cutscenes is redundant. The campaign mode doesn't present the same linearity as Half-Life, or even Deus Ex, but the successful completion of missions still triggers the subsequent plot elements. The requirements for each mission are Boolean: pass or fail. The campaign itself may be as straight as an arrow, but is still varied, deep, and seems to go on forever.

This is a very good thing. You can play for weeks and not try out all of the vehicles on offer. It's like Gran Turismo in that

every border in the world is potential flashpoint... Codemasters has promised a steady stream of downloads

terrain. This way you can plan in advance where to take cover along the way, what features would make the best ambush points, and so forth.

The presentation of combat for a lone soldier is impressive, but from there the sky's



POTENTIAL FLASHPOINTS

The mod scene is going to have a field day with Flashpoint. Every man and his dog has a grudge against some foreign power, and now you can live out any expansionistic fantasy. Here's the PowerPlay most wanted mod list:

- 1: East Timor
- 2: Kashmir
- 3: Hainan Island
- 4: The West Bank
- 5: Northern Ireland
- 6: Cyprus
- 7: Northern England
- 8: Chechnya
- 9: Redfern
- 10: New Zealand

respect, only a lot of the vehicles have guns on them, and you needn't just drive them around in circles. Come to think of it, GT didn't have the A-10 in it either. The cannon on the front of it is the size of a small car, and shred a tank in half a second.

As George Bush Senior might put it, this is the ultimate battle between good and evil, right and wrong. But every border in the world is a potential flashpoint, and Codemasters has promised us a steady



stream of downloadable campaigns, gratis. Any war of the 20th or 21st century, real or imagined, can now be brought to the table. It's no longer just soccer teams that can go head-to-head for national pride, soon the armies of the developed world will be duking it out online.

What is your major malfunction?

The editor included with Operation Flashpoint doesn't yet have that scope, but it is quite serviceable, allowing one to mess around with four different islands. It's simply a matter of dragging the map around, placing down units and objectives, and away you go. It doesn't have the scope to introduce or modify vehicle types, but with the basic game engine in place, it's only a matter of time before every military vehicle in the world, even if it's still on the drawing board, will get a look in. Comanche, Bushmaster, those freaky Swedish tanks that don't have turrets: it's all within the realms of possibility.

All of this power and flexibility comes at a price, though. Unless you have a gigahertz or more on the clock, and one of the latest generation of graphics cards, WWII will be a little hard going. The intrinsic gameplay is not affected, only the texture detail and framerate. Fortunately, the tense atmosphere is not diminished. Graphics are most in demand when on the one of the vehicle-based missions, but the liberating sensation of having an extra layer of metal skin protecting your own is solace enough.

Operation Flashpoint represents tremendous value for money. The campaign included will easily last you fifty hours plus, and when you combine that with the potential for LAN, Internet play, and customising your own missions, then the fun can easily last until Operation Flashpoint 2. It's like having a virtual sandbox full of army men, but without Trip Hawkins looking over your shoulder. The possibilities are endless, kids. This could be the game of the year.

James Cottee

PCPP

FOR

- Awesome atmosphere
- Huge campaign
- Unlimited potential

AGAINST

- Hefty system requirements
- Takes a while to get into

OVERALL

War has never been so much fun

94%

MECHCOMMANDER 2

Why pilot one mech when you can command a whole troop?

DETAILS

DEVELOPER

Microsoft

PUBLISHER

Microsoft

DISTRIBUTOR

Microsoft

PRICE

TBA

RATING

GB+

NEED

PII-400, 64Mb
RAM, 8Mb
Videocard

WANT

PIII/Athlon 1GHz,
128Mb RAM, 64Mb
Videocard

MULTIPLAYER

Yes

AVAILABLE

Now



It takes a certain kind of person to strap themselves into a 25 meter high, armour plated tuxedo of death. And you're it. Bullied at school, overlooked for promotion, betrayed by your wife, victimised by the Country Women's Association and humiliated by your gay German Shepherd, a life as a mercenary warrior seems the only choice.

Microprose's Mechcommander is still a wonderfully playable, addictive and excellent example of what can be done within the realtime strategy genre. But what happens when you sell the developer to two different companies in the space of one year, and the original copyright holder gets engulfed by Microsoft? That Mechcommander 2 would be a worthy and sensible sequel to Microprose's original was never a forgone conclusion after so much disruption. But thankfully that's what we've got.

Sprites vs polygons

Mechcommander 2's new 3D game engine and polygon-based graphics are the most obvious change to the gameworld. It is a big departure from the original title's

sprite-based gameworld, but is handled well. Players used to the workings of Mechcommander will be amazed at how similar this new version feels to the original, while still providing enough new elements to move the franchise forward.

The advantages brought by having a 3D gameworld are quite obvious when you start playing. Placing units on hills allows them to fire further and duck down for cover, it also gives them an advantage over approaching vehicles as they move very slowly going uphill. The player can also take advantage of line-of-sight by hiding Mechs behind a hill or in a ravine and powering down their engines to avoid sensor detection. These kinds of effects were simulated in the original game, but are much more realistic and useful in the sequel.

However, the underlying differences in game design between the two versions are most obvious in the menus between missions and in the allocation of resource

points during missions. The Mechlab has been streamlined; grease stains removed and girly calendars pulled down to make mission preparation easier. Useable weapon and support systems are listed in the usual categories (energy, missile, projectile, etc) and also colour-coded into short, medium and long range. Of course, as this is an electronic version of the Battletech universe, the weapons are still the same ones that you know and hopefully love.

Mechcommander 2 handles electronic warfare equipment differently. Instead of being able to strip ECM and sensors from enemies and add them to a Mech capable of

at times you'll find yourself on the side of the Clan that you were working against as part of your previous contract

carrying them, now only certain Mechs can carry specific equipment in hardwired slots from which they cannot be removed. In other words, you cannot upgrade the sensors or ECM of a given Mech, you have to buy or capture one that already has them fitted.



ALLOCATING RESOURCE POINTS

Another welcome change to the game design is that you no longer need to take up valuable space and weight in your team for vehicles like mine layers. All your support vehicles, as well as artillery and air strikes, are now available from the support menu and paid for by resource points that you acquire by liberating resource buildings and trucks during the mission.



The advantage of occupying the hills in full effect



Room for improvement

On the bogus side of things, the new engine is a trifle slow, particularly with detailed textures enabled. The game was reviewed on a 1GHz PIII with 128Mb RAM and a GeForce2 MX card. Even running at 1024x768 the framerate was a bit clunky when using the camera to look around the gameworld. It should also be noted that the game engine seems to have been programmed for drabness; the world is too uniform in colour and could definitely use a perk up in that regard. Most modern videocards are capable of displaying more than just six shades of Khaki.

Another annoying issue is the AI. Troops in the original Mechcommander were a bit unforthcoming when it came to initiative. It was hoped that the new game would improve that or give the player more control with some AI commands, such as levels of aggression. Sadly, Mechs still need to have their hands held far too much and really should have been granted a bit more AI initiative. The enemies, even at the highest difficulty setting, are also a bit simple. They never use the kinds of tactics that you employ against them (such as ambushes

and decoys) and on many occasions a well placed artillery can make a mess of the toughest concentration of Mechs.

Mercenary medals

Pilots are given more respect in Mechcommander 2, and more ability. Instead of just being fallguys with a small amount of growth potential, they now earn special talents as they gain rank. There are three ranks possible with each having a unique set of abilities to offer. These skills include things like specialties in certain Mech weapons and classes (ie. Light Mech specialists will be harder to hit when piloting that class of vehicle) and piloting abilities such as sensor and jumping skills.

In the original game the entire story was part of one operation, whereas Mechcommander 2 places you in a more mobile outfit, taking part in many operations. At times you'll find yourself on the side of the Clan that you were working against as part of your previous contract, which can be fun. This is also how you acquire different classes of Mech for your team. Each Clan has different models at their disposal and you will gain access to them



too as you work for more and more people.

The multiplayer aspect of Mechcommander 2 has been improved and more fully exploited by Microsoft and there are now no less than six different game types (Elimination, King O Hill, Last Man Standing, Complex, Last On Hill and Orbital) with a maximum of eight teams in four factions. The host can decide which resource and support options to allow and set the cash amount and Mech availability levels as well.

Microsoft has managed to capture the strategic essence of the original game, even though it had to be rebuilt from scratch, and still added enough new elements to give it a fresh feel. It isn't perfect, but a little patch to improve the AI would go a long way to making it so.

George Soropos

PCPP

FOR

- Easier mech management
- LOS and elevation benefits
- Extensive online play

AGAINST

- 3D engine a bit sluggish
- AI is rather simple

OVERALL

Worthy successor to the original Microprose title

84%

HALF-LIFE BLUE SHIFT

Isn't it nice to see a familiar face?



DETAILS

DEVELOPER

Gearbox

PUBLISHER

Sierra

DISTRIBUTOR

Vivendi

PRICE

\$49.95

RATING

M15

NEED

P-200
32MB RAM

WANT

PII-300
64MB RAM
16MB Videocard

MULTIPLAYER

Yes

AVAILABLE

Now



Blueshift, a term used in astrophysics, refers to a change in the wavelength of light reflecting off a body travelling toward the observer at immense speed. Unfortunately, this add-on campaign by Opposing Force veterans Gearbox doesn't seem to be moving at all. It's classic Half-Life in every way; classic weapons, classic enemies, classic environments. This is not necessarily a purely bad thing, as Blue Shift remains a solid, dependable and entertaining shooter, but appeals only when too much Half-Life is barely enough.

The Blue Shift package exists in that strange half world that isn't quite budget but isn't quite full price either. Retailing at \$50, the Blue Shift pack contains the rather short title campaign and also the original Half-Life expansion Opposing Force, which between them add up to the length of the original Half-Life. Also included is a graphical update called the High Definition Pack. This plug-in improves the texture detail, model

complexity and many of the animations in the game, and applies to all iterations of Half-Life. It's also worth noting that the Blue Shift expansion does not require the original Half-Life to run, and can be installed independently for those who want to keep their Half-Life version 1.0.0.1 'pure'.

Blue Shift follows the misadventures of Barney Calhoun, a humble security guard at the Black Mesa complex. In a self-conscious parody of the opening of Half-Life, Barney's vital statistics are listed on the screen, revealing a partially completed education at some obscure college with an 'undecided major' - a far cry from Gordon Freeman's advanced doctorate in quantum physics or whatever it was.

Barney starts work like any other day, with an interminable tram ride into the depths of Black Mesa. For keen Half-Life fans

the trip is interesting as it offers a closer look at the topside dormitories and some of the other amenities supplied by Black Mesa, such as a charming cafeteria and a laundromat complete with arcade games.

When the tram finally arrives at Barney's designated work area, he's given the dubious honour of running down to the Sector C elevator where two scientists are impatiently waiting inside a jammed lift - apparently security personnel also double as maintenance workers. A quick bang with a

the campaign lasts for a bare five hours, but only when playing very carefully, trying not to take damage

spanner, and the lift is on its way deep into the complex whereupon, as we were expecting, all hell breaks loose.

Blue Shift is simple survival horror. As a lowly security guard, Barney has no delusions of grandeur. Not for him is the

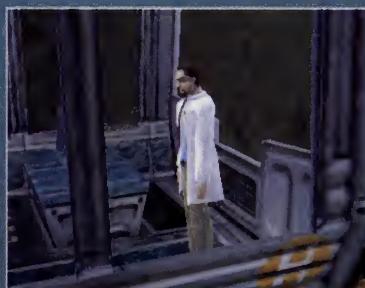
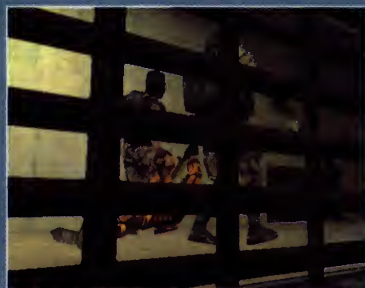
ONLINE

www.blueshift.com
Internet incubation made easy and disease-free.

www.barney.com
It's that freaky pink dinosaur thing. Our society is very, very sick.

IT'S YOUR OLD PAL GORDY

Like *Opposing Force*, *Blue Shift* takes place at the same time as events are unfolding in the original *Half-Life*. This is used very effectively during Barney Calhoun's misadventures, with numerous references to both Gordon Freeman and Sheppard the corporal from *Opposing Force*. A couple of Gordy references stick out. You will of course recall the original train ride, where Gordon Freeman passed a security guard on a platform banging on a door. Left then, we see a shot from *Blue Shift* where it is revealed that the security guard on the platform was Barney himself. And on right, we see the famous 'What will we do with the body?', 'What body? Heheheh!' sequence from about half-way through the original game. It's almost like watching *Back to the Future II*...



Here, a concerned scientist offers Barney a leg-up



slaying of great champions, not upon his weedy shoulders does the future of the world rest. Barney just wants to get out, and it's not long before he meets up with a group of scientists who also want to get out. A quick trip to the alien world of Xen to calibrate a teleporter, followed by a pitched battle with the military, and Barney is free. That's about it.

The campaign lasts for a bare five hours, but only when playing very carefully, trying not to take damage and looking for all possible secret areas. There are no bosses, and in fact not many enemies at all. Only the core weapons are available, and once the machine gun and combat shotgun have been located there's not much call for anything else.

What *Blue Shift* lacks in quantity it certainly makes up for in quality. There are a number of excellent firefights with the invading military forces, making the best use of 50mm cannons and exploding plate-glass windows. *Blue Shift* also includes numerous scripted events that add a little extra depth

to the *Half-Life* world, such as scientists offering a leg-up through overhead vents and soldiers loosing their heads to exploding soft-drink machines.

The High Definition Pack, the other new element of this title, makes a considerable difference to the graphics of all *Half-Life* campaigns and multiplayer maps. Textures are markedly improved but the real difference is seen in the detail on character models and weapons. The scientists now look less like ghastly wax mummies and their ties flap correctly as they shift their weight. The soldiers now have high detailed utility belts and it's possible to see which commandos are carrying grenades. The number of polygons on the player weapons have been increased, although for some reason the machine gun is now black instead of silver.

Even though the engine is fast approaching its third birthday, the visuals are still competitive and look very effective on a wide range of systems. It's refreshing to see a game with good looks that will run

on something as modest as a Celeron 450 with an 8Mb graphics adaptor. The High Definition Pack further increases the game's visual longevity.

The bottom line for *Blue Shift* is heavily dependant upon whether or not you already own *Opposing Force*. If *Half-Life* is more than half your life and you've downloaded every amateur add-on campaign ever developed and maybe even made a few of your own, *Blue Shift* is going to seem a big waste of money although, paradoxically, *Half-Life* devotees will love its faithfulness to the *Half-Life* universe. If you've only just this moment beaten that big floating brain thing at the end of the original episode, then *Blue Shift* is excellent value, containing as it does two quality expansion packs and the High Definition graphical update. Those looking to have their *Half-Life* horizons broadened, however, will be disappointed. This is strictly trad.

Anthony Fordham

PCPP

FOR

- Set pieces
- *Opposing Force*
- Hi Def pack

AGAINST

- Too short
- No new elements

OVERALL

Nicely done but far too short

78%

GANGSTERS 2 VENDETTA

Oils ain't oils



DETAILS

DEVELOPER
Hothouse Creations

PUBLISHER
Ozisoft

PRICE
\$79.95

RATING
M15+

NEED
PII-266, 64Mb RAM,
4MB Videocard

WANT
PIII-450, 128MB
RAM, 16MB
Videocard

MULTIPLAYER
Yes

AVAILABLE
Now



The first Gangsters title didn't make much of a splash on the world stage. Despite an interesting premise, basically being the first Sim Gangster game, it fell down in a few key areas. The interface was stilted, the gameworld was difficult to interpret, there was little depth to combat, the economics were a chore, the rewards were few and far between, and the graphics were as ugly as sin. For a 1998 release it looked like something from a mid-90s bargain bin.

screams "budget", and the budget conscious out there will know this is a common euphemism for "slapdash"

But it held promise. Strategy gamers are willing to forgive all kinds of illogical rubbish if they can get close to a fantasy world where they hold absolute power, and the combination of anal financial management and pointless violence could conceivably be

more interesting than doing one's tax return. Gangsters begged for some nicer graphics, a streamlined interface, and the potential to reward time invested in it. It begged for a sequel.

It's not a TV, Maria...

So, three years later, Gangsters 2 is here to knock our trainspotting socks off. Promising multiplayer options and a well-designed campaign mode, it hopes to drag players away from Tribes 2 and Emperor into the fantastic world of speak-easies and numbers rackets. You play Joey Bane, heir to large crime family who returns after a leave of absence to find his father Brutally Slain. In a crudely animated intro sequence you Swear Revenge on the underworld of North America, and hence your 20-odd city (level) task begins.

Cities in Gangsters 2 are stylised versions of a metropolis, only a few city blocks to a side. Little persons plod about like the happy little drones they are, using all the

businesses and so forth in realtime. Certain establishments show up as icons on the game map, and possession of these determines the amount of territory each gang controls. The objective, of course, is to own the whole map. This is accomplished by hiring gangsters to beat down local businesses, rub out rivals and bribe the authorities.

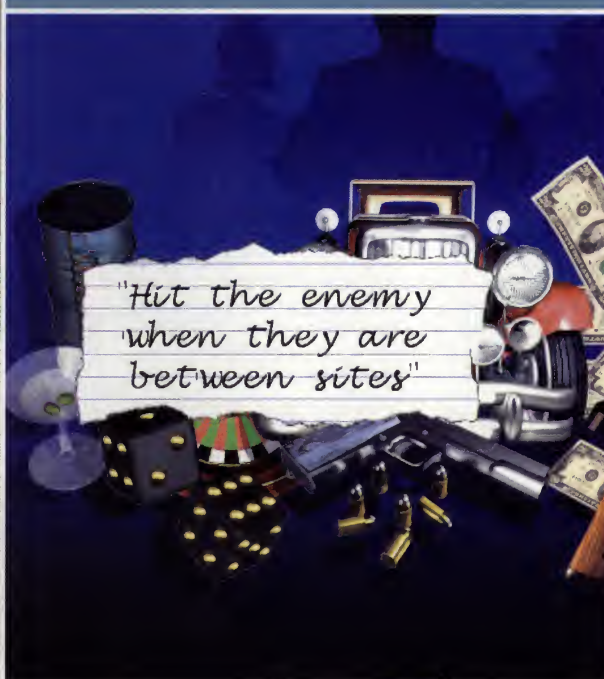
It's a microwave!

Where in the first Gangsters game this was handled in a stop-start turn-based fashion, events now progress in the state of Temperance in realtime. Roughly a minute of game time for every second in the real world. The theory behind this is that banks can be knocked over after dark, whilst legitimate business is done during daylight hours. The reality is that there are huge slabs of time where you're twiddling your thumbs, interspersed with crucial elements that the entire game hinges on. It's in these times of crisis that the game interface comes to the



RUDE HEADS

Anyone who's ever read Dick Tracey knows that gangsters have rude heads, often to the point of grotesque self-parody. Perhaps it's this underlying sense of inadequacy that leads otherwise normal folk into a life of crime? Readers are encouraged to examine the editorial page of this fine mag, and make their own guess as to which PowerPlay writer will be the first to crack. (Eager readers will have to wait until next month. Or peruse a back issue - Ed)



fore.

You don't have direct control over your men, not even Joey Bane. Instead, you give them orders, and watch in horror as they attempt to carry them out. If they blow a hit

TEMPERANCE

The setting for Gangsters 2 is completely fabricated. In this made up interpretation of the 1920s,

"Temperance" is a state in the US midwest, with Buffalo City, the starting location, roughly where Chicago would be on a real map. Has Hothouse Creations created an intricately designed alternate history of the US, explaining this arbitrary setting, a la The Man In The High Castle? Well, no. Like every other aspect of the game, there's so little reason attached to this decision that you're left wondering if it was accident or design. Plus, the real city of Chicago has a real mayor, who might sue over such a shabby depiction of his city...



and end up with half a dozen rival mobsters on their tail, it's not the end of the world. Once they've run a block or two the baddies will forget you exist and return to their posts. It's a classy trait that one only sees in the finest Al money can buy.

The key to tactical success is in concentrating your firepower: two-to-one will win in most any shootout. Or, if you're feeling all South Central, you can do an honest-to-God drive-by. This consists of your little man getting in a car, which then speeds off in a slow, crudely animated fashion until it's in the vicinity of your mark. Then it's simply a matter of driving back and forth spraying them with Tommy-gun rounds until they drop. If you're lucky, your little man won't get out of the car in the middle of the operation and attempt to bumrush the target's agitated friends.

There are three different map views, none of which offer a satisfactory platform for controlling any operation. The means of

assessing your performance are disparate and difficult to interpret. The screen feels cluttered, and the visualisation of the cityscape, particularly the jarring way the tops of buildings vanish so you can see your men running behind them, does nothing to suspend your disbelief.

Family ties

Let's recap: the graphics are primitive almost to the point of being retro, the means of controlling and interpreting the machinations of your little empire are stilted, the action is flaccid, and the rewards are meagre.

If this was a vital and well-implemented vision of gangland America, Gangsters 2 could have been a real charmer. But it uses the setting like a crutch, an excuse for a sterile gameworld that makes one pine for the days of Syndicate. Every facet of its being screams "budget", and the budget-conscious out there will know this is a common euphemism for "slapdash." Gangsters 2 is destined to be fitted for a set of concrete boots, and will shortly be joining its sibling at the bottom of the harbour.

James Cottee

PCPP

FOR

- Live out gansta' fantasies
- Petite system needs

AGAINST

- Horrible interface
- Not any fun

OVERALL

A nice idea, poorly implemented

51%

TROPICO

The maker of Railroad Tycoon 2 takes an island holiday

DETAILS

DEVELOPER

Pop Top

PUBLISHER

Take 2 Interactive

DISTRIBUTOR

Take 2 Interactive

PRICE

\$69.95

RATING

M15+

NEED

P-200, 32MB RAM,
820MB HDD

WANT

PII-300, 64MB RAM

MULTIPLAYER

No

AVAILABLE

Now



It's often been said that there is nothing sexier than riding in seventy tonnes of battlemech. This is wrong. There is nothing sexier than wielding complete power over a small Caribbean Island and being called El Presidente.

Now, unless you have access to a private mistress or are some sort of genuine Caribbean dictator, you're not likely to feel

tinkering idly with cash reserves while workers themselves decide if they want to construct important projects

this giddy power. Thankfully, there is an alternative. Tropico provides a pretty close simulation of the real experience, although one must certainly provide the rum and cigars oneself.

Somewhere between Sim City and Warcraft sits Tropico. Given the control of a small island which is technically democratic, the player schemes, deals, jockeys, positions, bribes, impresses and wheedles for continued power, personal and national economic development and maybe even the

prosperity of the island of Tropico. It's amusing without being a joke a minute and allows one to be a bad guy without an excess of Severance-style gore and hate. While I like gore and hate as much as the next man, sometimes it's nice to pull back and be less than evil.

Settling in

The gameplay is complex and engrossing. The skeleton beneath the skin of this game is a pure and simple builder. Using a handful of islanders, a few farms and shacks, a dock and your palace you must create an economy with more farms, mines and logging camps. Tobacco crops, distilleries and other cash and import/export raising products not only provide a national infrastructure, but also feed your rich Swiss bank account.

As always the people demand entertainment, health care, churches to worship in and education. The people are very religious. Then you begin to make decisions like "well, I know that's a beautiful natural beach. I know that I could put a hotel on there and have thousands of happy fat tourists come and play, but, hell with it, I'm

gonna wack a big strip mine there." Pretty simple, eh? Start balancing the needs of the various political factions.

You might be going well, ripping down trees, planting tobacco and pineapples, putting armed guards on every corner, paying your workers nothing and making them sleep in urine-stained hell-hole shanties. You'll be making a lot of money, but you'll have desperately unhappy citizens. On the other hand, try to create a utopia where everyone is happy and there are very few laws and you can just watch the coup that follows. Compromise and keep the money rolling in while having decent work and decent jobs and of course the environmentalists will make you look bad at the polls. If you even have an election.

Info freako

Complicated, political, detailed, with many factors contributing to your success and failure, Tropico should be a game of intense micromanagement. It isn't. Certainly there is a freakish amount of information in the game. And much of it is relevant but it seems that direct control is beyond the player's capacity. Too much is out of your



YOU ARE MY CASTRO

Perhaps the best part of Tropic is designing the dictator you'll be playing. You can take either the pretty damn cool Che Guevara, to the demoniacal Papa Doc. If you decide to really push it, you can even add a delicate character flaw. Boozer, flatulent, whatever you like. And if you feel like playing an American presidential dynastic hatemongering fool, you can pick moronic and religious zealot.



hands and it's the single biggest flaw in an otherwise fine product. Control of social and economic trends sounds fun but sometimes you just can't get the fine control that you need. Too much balance creates a dearth of gaming fun.

Individual workers cannot be controlled directly. Sure, you can pay them well, but you can't stop them from falling asleep when it's time to unload docks and I'm convinced they were spending more time in church than was healthy. I know that sounds like I'm missing the point of the game, but sometimes playing is a matter of just watching and tinkering idly with cash reserves while the workers themselves decide if they want to construct important projects.

During later stages of the game, this gets worse. When the larger nations begin to

make requests, your advisor is continually telling you to cave into their demands. Combining strong independence of units with off-screen pressure removes the player from the in-game action. You become facilitation to code, not an active participant.

Basket ladies

The interface could have used some more work as well. Poptop has made a classic mistake: slowing time to give instructions, then speeding up while they are implemented and then it slows down again. It interrupts the organic feel of the game like a slap to the eyes (*A slap to the eyes?* - Ed). And it breaks the game down into one long search for cash. You can't gently manipulate the fabric of Tropic. No cash means no game options. No game options means no gameplay. I also find an

inability to directly communicate with anyone frustrating. Even simple diplomacy seems impossible.

Thankfully, the game is delightful to look at. Atmospheric visuals immerse the player totally within the Tropic world. The graphics are beautifully animated, with excellent little animations for the people. Everything from horrid American tourists to the cornerstone of world economy - old ladies with baskets on their backs. Zoom controls are impressive. Go from right in on individual people or your entire island below you. The Railway Tycoon II engine is in place here and its isometric perspective landscape engine works overtime.

And let's not forget the Latin music. The real stuff, not the Ricky Martin plastic-yanqui anthems. Buena Vista Social Club stuff for those of you keeping score. Very finger tapping hum along stuff. Perhaps not as cool as the Croc 2 music, but pretty damn hot (*Croc?! - Incredible Ed*).

Tropic is a strange piece of work. If you need the twitch, leave it be. If you like micromanaging down to the very final detail, leave it be. But if you want to get in on a new form of realtime strategy that challenges your style, check it out.

Christian Read

PCPP

FOR

- Visuals
- Complex
- Detailed

AGAINST

- Non-interactive
- Cash is king

OVERALL

An entertaining take on the Settlers theme

71%

LEADFOOT



Perramadda Speedway, eat yuz 'arts out.

DETAILS

DEVELOPER

Ratbag

PUBLISHER

Wizard Works

DISTRIBUTOR

Take 2 Interactive

PRICE

\$89.95

RATING

G

NEED

PIII-450, TNT2,
DirectX compatible
sound card, 40MB
HD, 64MB RAM

WANT

PII-800, Geforce
MX, 128MB RAM,
120MB RAM,
DirectX force
feedback wheel,
Direct sound3D
compatible sound
card

MULTIPLAYER

Yes

AVAILABLE

Now



Burning up
figure-eights of
brown



THE GOAL



The career mode boasts 15 series races with over 180 events. Winning races awards prize money which allows the upgrading of your car. Sponsorship can also be won, should you possess any racing prowess. Those who want to win the World championship are going to need sponsorship and prize money to do it.



ONLINE

www.ratbaggames.com
Check out the whole
Ratbag range and
links to relevant
official racing sites.

PCPP

FOR

■ Convincing high-
action stadium
racing.

AGAINST

■ For racing fans
only, options not
easily accessed.

OVERALL

Ratbag have done
it again - the
jumps! The mud!

80%

Specialised racing games are a big market - just ask Ratbag. After the awesome sci-future racing of Powerslide, they left the "action" racing genre completely for the lucrative rrracing market. Dirt Track Racing and DTR: Sprint Cars are two titles that prove making product for US markets is the smartest move an Aussie can make - prawns and barbies spring to mind. Stadium sports are virtually a religion in the States: indoor racing, monster trucks, wrestling. They're puritans over there, after all.

While millions of Americans are spending their hard-earned Benjamins on these sports, my involvement amounts to seeing the funny car ads with the screaming bloke (BEEEE THEARGH!!!). As a games journalist committed to enjoying everything my box has to offer (that came out wrong...), I now boldly go where rarely I've gone before.

Leadfoot is about cars, stadium off-road 4x4 racing cars to be more specific. Though featuring both quick race and multiplayer options, the meat of the game is the career mode: time trialing, racing, tuning, winning

promotion and just plain winning. That means dirt, slides and furious jumps on tight indoor courses with two classes of vehicle.

Cut sick on the speedway!

The Super Lites, also known as micros, are tiny buggies that offer a more frantic type of racing due to their light weight, short wheel base and small 500cc engine. The pick-up trucks or sports trucks are mid-size 4WD with 4 or 6 cylinders. These workhorses are like bricks and as such can be thrown around more recklessly. There are over three cars in each class.

The true physics model is stunning in the Ratbag way; they've been making amazing racing engines since Powerslide. Realistic jumps and compelling handling make Leadfoot a revhead's paradise.

The opponent AI is strong and challenging the game on higher difficulty settings is no mean feat.

Don't touch ma tyres, awroight?

Talk about customisation (*We were?* - Ed). In the garage option you can adjust nearly everything under the hood. In wheel tuning alone, you can set toe (in degrees), camber, tyre pressure (in PSI) and wheel size for each wheel. This is a game for those who want to tune, test, adjust, test etc, until the perfect combination is found.

the true physics model is stunning; realistic jumps and compelling handling make Leadfoot a revhead's paradise

Leadfoot is a unique and accomplished racing title that offers the whole package for those who love stadium racing. Some minor niggles like the lack of simple access to options, especially while racing, and the fact that this is fairly niche territory, keep this title from PowerPlay Gold. Nevertheless, this is the one for the racing fan and those in dire need of speed. As a new convert to this strange cult of racing, I say: "Bring it 00000N!"

John Dewhurst

OFFROAD REDNECK RACING

Hey ma! Get off the dang roof!

DETAILS

DEVELOPER

Interplay

PUBLISHER

Interplay

DISTRIBUTOR

Interplay

PRICE

\$49.95

RATING

G

NEED

TBA

TBA

TBA

WANT

TBA

TBA

TBA

MULTIPLAYER

Yes

AVAILABLE

Now



(above left) Yes, the crates don't stop at one!

ONLINE

www.redneckputters.com

The Home of Bubba-Joe and Lester! Offering simple, easy-to-read PC advice in a large font, for beginner and drunks alike.

www.fortogden.com/forredneck.html

You Might Be A Redneck If: fifth grade was the best six years of your life, or you have more than one brother named Darryl. &c.

The blame for this unremarkable piece of software lies squarely on the shoulders of an ancient outdoorsman game called *Deer Hunter*. While *Deer Hunter* itself wasn't explicitly a redneck-branded title, it did sell phenomenally well in truck stops and greasy diners all through the American south, and it helped create a likewise high-selling Redneck franchise. *Offroad Redneck Racing* is the latest to follow in a proud tradition from the seminal *FPS Redneck Rampage*, and even the *Redneck* branded-version of *Deer Hunter*.

This is racing at its blandest. A selection of tracks, a selection of cars, a championship mode to unlock new tracks and new cars, and that's about it. The usual options of time trial, single race and championship are all here, as well as several different skill levels which translate to better opponents in faster cars.

It's offroad racing in the sense that the tracks are very uneven and every surface is suitably contorted into jumps, ditches, puddles of water and numerous banks to crash into. The track detail is relatively good, with each themed circuit featuring its own collection of objects such as earth moving equipment, piles of logs, boatsheds, half built shacks and other less-than inspiring obstacles.

Crate fans are catered for with liberal

piles of wooden cartons and witches hats stacked precariously on difficult corners. They exist simply to provide spectacular 'smashing through the crates' moments, and do little to affect the course of a race - unless that is you hit a crate at a certain precise angle, whereupon your care will instantly come to a dead standstill.

This is the essential problem with *Offroad Redneck Racing*; collision detection. Combined with a lack-lustre driving model, it makes jostling for position a frustrating affair, as the car will occasionally spin-out for no reason, or hit a jump the wrong way and come to a dead stop.

The other question that needs to be asked is why this game has Redneck branding. Aside from a bluegrass soundtrack and the occasional 'yee hah!' there is little to distinguish this title from any other offroad racing game, such as *Leadfoot*, apart from the fact that it's not very good.

For this game to be successful, the

redneck angle needed to be played for all it was worth. A ridiculous parody of a career mode, the winning of a prize pig, drunk driving improving performance, all these posited elements could have helped turn an uninspiring racer into something mildly diverting.

It's difficult to recommend *Offroad Redneck Racing*, but the graphics are pleasant enough, the sensation of speed is adequate, and the driving model is tolerable for those who just want to go around and around. However, serious fans of offroad competition, and anyone who has sampled *Leadfoot*, should avoid.

Justin Hoffman

PCPP

OVERALL

Boring and amateur racing clone

57%

CRATE-TASTIC!

Even though the veracity of James Cottee's seminal work on the importance of crates in gaming has been contested by some, there's little doubt that the developers of *Offroad Redneck Racing* believe in him. It's safe to say that this game would be twice as boring and pointless without these crates (shown here) scattered randomly through tight corners. Crates non delenda est!



ELITE FORCE EXPANSION PACK

Elite Farce add-on, more like

DETAILS

DEVELOPER

Raven

PUBLISHER

Activision

DISTRIBUTOR

Activision

NEED

P-233, 64 Mb RAM, 8Mb Videocard, 150Mb HDD

WANT

PIII/IV/Athlon 1.2 GHz+, 128 Mb RAM, 64Mb Videocard

MULTIPLAYER

TCP/IP, LAN

AVAILABLE

Now



When I found out that Activision's new Elite Farce expansion pack would allow me to tour around an all-new and almost complete 'Virtual Voyager' I must admit to being thrilled. Actually getting to walk around Voyager, gosh.

After having a quick lie down to take the edge off the excitement, I put on my jumpsuit, slicked back my hair and donned my communicator. "By the hammer of Granthor, you shall be avenged," I squealed as I charged down the corridors, my personal log swinging wildly from side to side.

In the past many companies have burdened themselves with foolish notions of good value, creativity and originality. These dinosaurs of game development actually think gamers want an enjoyable, long lasting experience set in their favourite sci-fi world. Activision has had the wisdom to see things as they really are.

Disappointment

You don't really want a whole new Voyager adventure do you? C'mon, you weren't expecting to get a whole new set of singleplayer missions put together in a coherent manner and depicting a new set of trials and tribulations for the members of your Hazard Team, surely?

If you were you're going to be bloody disappointed because what you've got is two singleplayer holodeck missions, both of

which can be finished in less than five minutes each, and a few new variations in the multiplayer game. In fact most of the new stuff concerns the multiplayer aspects of the game, which is rather curious.

Now if this were say, 1997 when every developer on earth thought online gaming was going to be bigger than a Liberal party slush fund it might - just - be forgivable. But now? If you have Gamespy Arcade take a look at how many people regularly play Elite Farce online in this country. You'd be lucky to count 100. Include the ones that play it on LANs around the country and you may, if you're lucky, count up about another 300-400. In other words Activision has made an expansion pack for about 500 people, maybe less.

Some class

Bully for them. Unfortunately the multiplayer stuff is pretty ordinary anyway. There is a 'Specialist' mode that creates characters a la Team Fortress, but no special game type for them, you use them in the team holomatch, free for all or capture the flag games. There is an Assimilation mode where one team acts as the Borg Queen and her minions while the other play as

Federation; when the Borg kill the Federation guys the Feds respawn as Borg. This is probably the best of the new games. Then there is Action Hero mode where one player starts with all weapons and ammo and whoever kills him gets 5 frags and respawns as the new Action Hero.

The singleplayer element to this expansion pack is nothing less than an insult to PC gamers everywhere. You get two missions. One based on Tom Paris' Captain

what you've got is two singleplayer holodeck missions, both of which can be finished in less than five minutes each

Proton holoprogram that requires you to rescue Constance Goodheart from the evil clutches of the evil Chaotica and another where you have to infiltrate a Klingon base. To be blunt there are user made mods around that make both these missions look like a token joke. Both missions are very short, very predictable and very dull. Very dull.

In short, the Elite Farce Expansion pack manages to put itself in the category of worst expansion pack ever. It's a waste of money people, money you could be saving for something cool like Operation Flashpoint or Arcanum!

George Soropos

PCPP

FOR

■ If sharpened and aimed carefully CD can be used for taking the heads off pigeons

AGAINST

■ If sharpened and aimed carefully CD can be used for taking the heads off pigeons

30%

MERCHANT PRINCE 2

Turn-based strategy whose turn will never come

DETAILS

DEVELOPER

Holistic Design

PUBLISHER

Talonsoft

DISTRIBUTOR

Take 2 Interactive

PRICE

\$69.95

RATING

GB+

NEED

P-133, 32MB RAM,
80MB HDD

WANT

P-200, 64MB RAM,
Pillow

MULTIPLAYER

Yes

AVAILABLE

Now



This, dear reader, is about as exciting as the Prince gets



HERE'S WHAT YOU'RE MISSING

The Renaissance, especially in Italy, was a time of high intrigue, adventure and human learning. The Church and the State came together and apart, assassinations were commonplace and the great houses made secret war on each other. This was the time of Lucrecia Borgia, the beautiful lethal Princess of her house, and Machiavelli. Wars were fought over the hidden technologies of geniuses like Leonardo DaVinci and the patronage of artists was as much a weapon as any cannon. But you wouldn't know it from playing this game.



Merchant Prince 2 is a turn-based strategy game, though it dresses that up some. You are a Renaissance-era Venetian, steeped in the lore of the Borgias and the De Medici's, locked in quite literally cutthroat competition with three other traders to create trade routes around the world. The first trader to reach one million florins secures the title of merchant prince and wins the game.

Most properly, this is done through the tried and tested methods of research and the creation of roads and the careful trade of goods such as ivory, silk, grog and gold. Of course, with the pirates raiding the seas and the vagaries of nature, as well as vicious bandit kings out to steal the teeth from your skull and the threat of plague, you are forever at the mercy of the vicissitudes of fate (*Golly - Ed*).

But it's the politics of Venice that are the real fun. A nice little feedback loop is created

whereby political power is used to increase economic influence, and in turn this allows greater political favour which is used to increase wealth. It's knowing when to stay on the bus and when to jump off that makes the ride a delicate and dangerous one. Bribery of political and religious officials will make your plans run faster; if they mess with you too hard, their execution may also grease your wheels. Always be aware of your options in the black operations area, too, including arsonists, slanderers, assassins and mercenaries.

In graphical terms, the game has barely been updated from the original. With exotic locations from all around the world, one would think that foreign cities and the like would be things of beauty. Instead, there's a vague uniformity. The area map is useless. It's too small to readily oversee the various parts of your empire. Conversely, the play map is too bloody big!

However, the real problem with

Merchant Prince 2 is that won't hold your interest. Far too often you will have nothing more to do than watch money accumulate in the bank as your traders go about their business. It's monotonous. No, that's not quite right. It gets stone boring too quickly. Not only will you find yourself waiting for some horrid disaster to happen so you'll have something to do, the damn sound seems to be perfectly calibrated to suck the atmosphere right out of the game. Perhaps this is because there are no sound effects to speak of.

Merchant Prince 2 looks old and plays old. Go back and load up Civilization, the first one, and see how it holds up today. That's what Merchant Prince is up against. In its day it might have been the best trading game in the whole wide world, now it's like Elvis near the end. Which is a shame because the premise behind it and the basic mechanics offer plenty of potential.

Christian Read

PCPP

FOR

■ Nice historical detail

AGAINST

■ Dull play
■ Horrendous map screens
■ Boring to the end

42%

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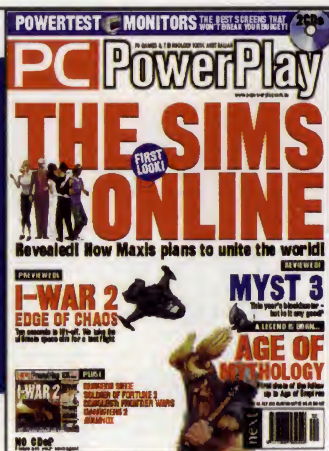
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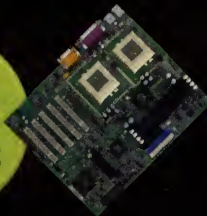


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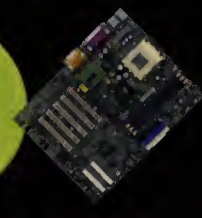
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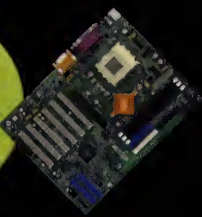
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- Support PCI2.2 and D-Led (Diagnostic LEDs)

MS 815EP Pro-R



- Support Intel PIII up to 1GHz
- Support ATA100 and IDE RAID
- Support AGP Pro
- Support PCI2.2 and D-Led (Diagnostic LEDs)

MS K7T Turbo-R



- Support Athlon 200/266FSB processor
- Support 1AGP/3DIMM/6PCI slot
- Support ATA100 and IDE RAID
- Support PCI2.2 and D-Led (Diagnostic LEDs)

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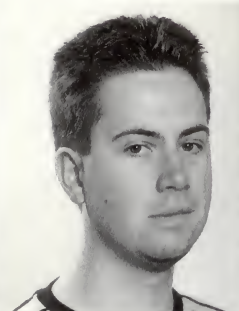
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IN REVIEW

The silicon state of the art

TECH



My keyboard broke this month, and it wasn't until it was gone that I realised how important our keyboards really are, and how callously we take them for granted. My crusty old Honeywell Spacemate II into which I had spilt everything from chocolate cake to titanium shavings, had almost become an extension of my body. Especially for someone writing several thousand words a month, in many ways it was my computer.

Imagine how rudely my complacency was shattered when the D key stopped working. And after that, when the W key stopped working. Of course it was coincidence that these were the first casualties, what with all the Quake3 hours I've put in, and it made life rather difficult, especially trying to title my new children's novel: Watch Andy and Sarah Dance.

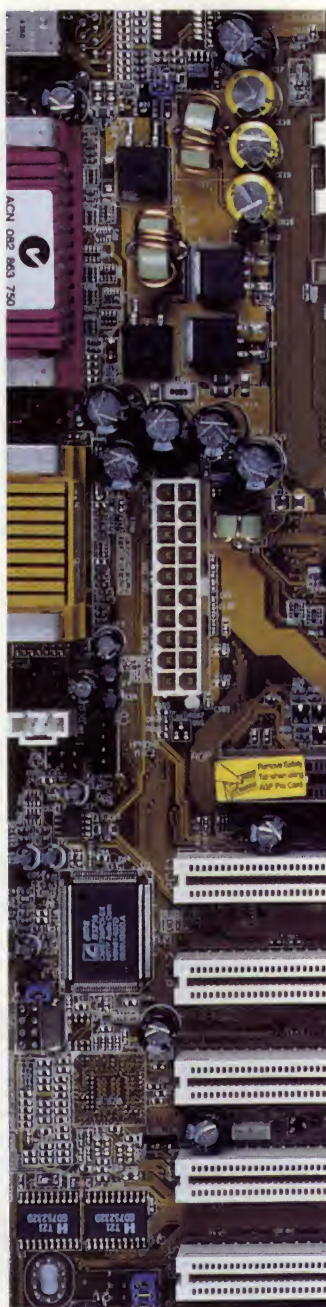
So the Spacemate II got pitched over the side of the Anzac Bridge and I went down to Harvey Norman to buy a new keyboard. And it was a difficult time. Nothing felt quite right. Even the new Honeywell boards didn't feel right, because they didn't have the right collection of stains and little broken bits.

Eventually I settled on a nice Microsoft board because basically I'm a tool of the system... no, honestly this was the best available, although it was pretty pricey. But I'm a firm believer in the importance of the keyboard. A good monitor, a good mouse, and a good keyboard should all take precedence over GeForce3s and P4 1.7GHz processors. After all, the keyboard is what you'll actually have to put your actual hands on.

It's because of this, and because the keyboard and mouse are so often marginalised that we've PowerTested a whole brace of control devices for you this month. Everything from the humble board to the overly complex force-feedback gamepad. And then, as if one PowerTest wasn't enough, we've included a second mini-PowerTest if you like, a round up of six hard drives that will give you room to breath and speed to impress your friends.

It's a chunky tech section indeed this month, enjoy!

anthonyf@next.com.au



86	Input Device PowerTest
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	Soyo SY-K7VTA Pro
97	Diamond View 1995SL

THE PCPP TECH AWARDS SYSTEM



The Power Award is given to the highest performing product in each PowerTest. We don't take into account the cost of the component, or what extra functionality it might have. We just look for raw power.



The Value Award is given in the PowerTest each month to the product that offers the best balance between performance and cost. It also takes into account any extras that come with the product.



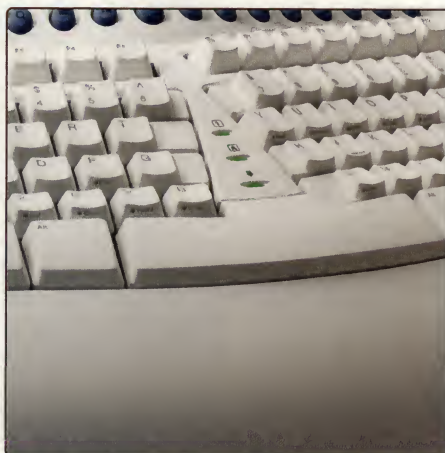
In our definitive Hotware reviews, any product deemed revolutionary, of exemplary value, or simply so cool it's a must-have, will receive a score above 90%, and the coveted PC PowerPlay Gold award.

THE PCPP HOTWARE RATINGS SYSTEM

90+	Excellent, Gold Award. A must buy.
80-89	Worthy product, which is hard to fault. May be slightly lacking in extra features, value or performance.
60-79	Competent product, significantly behind the State of the Art.
40-59	Mediocre with little to recommend it.
0-39	A dog. Avoid.
Distributor	The local point of contact for the product.
Price	The RRP at the time of going to print.
URL	Where to find further relevant information.

Control Freak

GAMING CONTROL DEVICE POWERTEST BY JOHN DEWHURST AND JACK KULYK



It's clear that not enough attention is paid to gaming control. Magazines, including PCPP, will occasionally review a joystick or two up the back of the tech section, but this level of coverage is disproportionate to the importance of the control device you need to adequately, and expertly, play.

While this PowerTest examines a variety of wheels, joysticks and gamepads, we have paid special attention to the humble keyboard and mouse. While the benefits of a good mouse are obvious - especially for FPS and

RTS control - the value of a good keyboard likewise cannot be understated.

We have examined both expensive leading brand models from Logitech and Microsoft as well as a couple of 'el cheapo' boards which cost less than \$30. Should you disregard the keyboard and take this vital device for granted, or should you shop around and be prepared to spend a little more for superior robustness and control? After this PowerTest, we now strongly believe the latter.

One interesting discovery that came out of this PowerTest was the usefulness of a trackball. While the design of the trackball is

absolutely key, correct ergonomics can actually improve response times and aim. This is because movement is managed by the fine motor control of the fingers, rather than the more awkward shoulder and elbow muscles routinely employed for vigorous mouse work. That said, the trackball is clearly not for everyone, it's a case of 'if you can handle it, you will love it, otherwise, leave it well alone.'

So here then are 24 control devices which will either improve or hinder your gaming performance. With PCPP's help, you will now be able to determine which is most suitable for you.

HOW WE TESTED

For keyboards and mice we used the two most demanding genres: Realtime Strategy and Firstperson Shooter. Our RTS game of choice was the redoubtable Starcraft, and for FPS action we used Quake3 for multiplayer and Undying for singleplayer. We played the same level, on the same settings, using each device, and employed the abilities of both beginner and expert

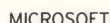
players (we found both passed-out on the Hyper couch) to see which devices helped and which hindered.

For joysticks we used both I-War 2 for simulator play and Space Tripper for arcade play. Gamepads were limited to Space Tripper and Offroad Redneck Racing to gauge their usefulness in driving games. Wheels were tested using NFS Porsche 2000 with force-

feedback both enabled and disabled.

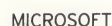
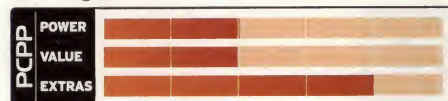
Each device was graded on the fly out of five, and these results were merged with the usual PowerTest considerations in order to obtain with the Power, Value and Extra scores you have come to expect. You will note not every category has received a Power or Value award, but some awards have been given for particularly worthy products.





DISTRIBUTOR	Microsoft
PRICE	\$99.95
URL	www.microsoft.com

While ergonomic design is preferred for subtle desktop work, the extreme movements needed for gaming ironically place extra strain on both the wrist and the elbow and hinder movement, and of course the mouse only works in the right hand.



DISTRIBUTOR	Microsoft
PRICE	\$99.95
URL	www.microsoft.com

The thumb joint also becomes very sore after even a short amount of use, and we can only presume the model for the ergonomic design had extremely short digits. The black finish, however, remains highly seductive.



DISTRIBUTOR	Logitech
PRICE	\$109
URL	www.logitech.com

As the iFeel mouse is identical in shape and size to the cheaper and more conventional Logitech Optical Mouse, this gimmicky product cannot be effectively recommended, especially at this price.



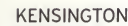
DISTRIBUTOR	Logitech
PRICE	\$149
URL	www.logitech.com

In the end, while the Cordless Trackman Wheel is comfortable to use on the desktop, it - like the Microsoft Trackball Optical - cannot be recommended as a viable gaming control device.



DISTRIBUTOR	Acco
PRICE	\$59.95
URL	www.accoaust.com

Basically, with the Kensington Mini Optical you receive the fine motor benefits of a trackball, but retain the traditional functionality of the mouse. The only possible complaint is that fingers can slip off the top of the buttons at critical moments, so a slightly squarer top would have been preferred.



DISTRIBUTOR	Acco
PRICE	\$99.95
URL	www.accoaust.com

The six buttons at the top are web page presets. Entirely plausible but perhaps frivolous, especially considering getting to the buttons on the top of the unit is not easy. The other big flaw is the lack of optical recognition. If Kensington combine this design with an optical ball, they could very well own the market. Capable unit that lacks the precision of its optical brethren.





MICROSOFT NATURAL PRO

DISTRIBUTOR Microsoft

PRICE \$119

URL www.microsoft.com

This odd device is somewhat over-powered for mere gaming, with a pioneering ergonomic design that allegedly reduces stress on the wrists from prolonged typing. The only keys that are liable to be regularly depressed by a gamer are W, S, A and D, so conventional and convenient placement should hold sway over enhanced ergonomics.

The Natural Pro does indeed put the left hand in a more comfortable position for WSAD work, but the ergonomic design has resulted in the spacebar, CTRL and ALT keys all being positioned somewhat uniquely and also having unconventional shapes and sizes. The CTRL key in particular is huge, and it's possible to mishit the key by pressing too far to the edge.

However, the keyboard is very well weighted and won't shift on the desk, the keys have a degree of travel and a mechanism that is little short of perfect, and the Natural Pro also includes two USB ports on the top edge of the keyboard, further increasing functionality.



LOGITECH DELUXE ACCESS 104

DISTRIBUTOR Microsoft

PRICE \$49

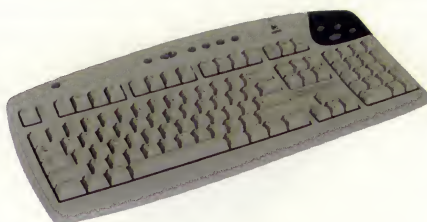
URL www.logitech.com

A quality keyboard marred by a couple of odd design decisions, the Deluxe Access 104 is Logitech's budget offering. A standard 104 layout, the Deluxe Access does provide some extra functionality with three internet buttons - www, mail and search - positioned between the cursor keys and the del/end/pgdn keys.

Unfortunately, the positioning of these extra keys means the six keys (starting with home) in the middle are non-standard in size, and any player who binds these keys for use with the cursor keys may find themselves making errors or even accidentally starting Explorer in the middle of the game.

Also, a high ridge on the bottom of the keyboard makes the hand position for WSAD control seem somewhat precarious, although attaching the provided palm rest does alleviate this somewhat.

A good keyboard with a good mechanism, made fiddly by odd design.



LOGITECH FREEDOM NAVIGATOR

DISTRIBUTOR Logitech

PRICE \$229

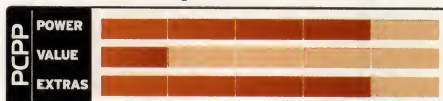
URL www.logitech.com

This fantastically expensive device is intended to remove the pain of tangled cables by providing a cordless solution for the desktop. Using a standard 104-key layout with extra internet and multimedia keys, the Freedom Navigator package also includes a cordless mouse, and works well to reduce desktop clutter.

The most immediate concern with this cordless keyboard is that mobile telephones seem to interfere with the signal. When a phone is being used near the keyboard, the 'repeat' function - where holding down a key repeats the letter - stutters and will occasionally pause. This has enormous impact on reflex-based games such as Q3A.

As a gaming keyboard the Freedom Navigator stacks up reasonably well with a fairly heavy-duty mechanism and good travel. The extra media buttons are rather rubbery but the board is heavy and won't shift around the desk in times of ire.

Not as heavy-duty as the other keyboards here, at this price the Freedom Navigator should only be considered if desktop clutter is a real concern.



MITSUBISHI DIAMOND TOUCH

DISTRIBUTOR Mitsubishi Electronics

PRICE \$24.95

URL www.mitsubishielectronics.com

No Frills Please, We're Gaming Purists. This is a very basic keyboard with no extras at all, just a PS2 connection and build quality that indicates a projected lifespan of at least five years. This is a very heavy-duty board that can really take a pounding.

The mechanism, while good, does feel a little sluggish, but this should only affect touch-typists and has little impact on WSAD control. The best feature of this keyboard is its inherent conservatism; every key is traditionally placed and all your bad typing and gameplay habits are given free reign.

The board is quite small and should fit neatly into any PC nook, and some subtle ergonomics at the base of the keyboard mean the hand position is always normal. It is relatively light, however, and has a tendency to slip if things become too excitable.

Otherwise though, an excellent board and the negligible price makes it worthy addition to any budget Beast.



MICROSOFT INTERNET KEYBOARD

DISTRIBUTOR Microsoft

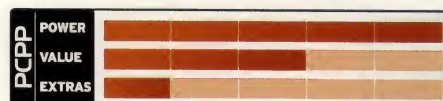
PRICE \$54.95

URL www.microsoft.com

A more basic keyboard from Microsoft, the Internet Keyboard is of the same construction quality as the Natural Pro but obviously lacks the ergonomic design. This provides a more traditional gaming platform and allows the superior Microsoft build quality to shine more readily.

Microsoft has clearly done extensive research and testing to determine the perfect shape and travel distance for a keyboard. For regular typing, the Internet Keyboard is extraordinarily comfortable, with a slight rounding on the keys. For gaming, this comfort is also felt and a smooth and responsive mechanism ensures key bindings are effective.

As a retail package the Internet Keyboard is about twice as expensive as the other budget boards here, and it's certainly not twice as good as the Mitsubishi board. However, if control is a priority - as it should be - the extra \$30 is a worthwhile investment. Definitely the keyboard of choice when the budget is generous.



HP 104 KEYBOARD

DISTRIBUTOR Achieva

PRICE \$25

URL www.achieva.com.au

Only slightly frillier than the ultra-lean Mitsubishi Diamond Touch, the HP keyboard offers little in the way of extras beyond a grey finish and three buttons at the top of the board marked Internet, Suspend and Information. We have no idea what Information is, since pressing the button had no effect.

The board feels odd to use owing to a very clacky mechanism, longer than normal travel, and the use of an excessively large font on the keys. It's amazing how something as simple as bigger letters can put you off your game. The keyboard is also very difficult to read in low-light conditions, so two-finger typists beware.

With the Diamond Touch available at the same price, there is little that makes this HP board stand out, however the grey finish is welcome relief from a universe of beige, and the sturdy construction should see this board last the distance.





URL www.microsoft.com

The stick only centres when powered, and the mechanism does add extra friction to movement in non-force games so it can feel a little sluggish at times. However, the superior build quality and minimalist button placement makes this the force-feedback joystick of choice, offering a weightier and more durable design over its little brother, the Sidewinder Force-Feedback 2. Rather expensive, though.



GRAVIS DESTROYER AFTERSHOCK

URL www.accoaust.com

The stick features plenty of buttons, but no twisting axis limits its versatility in games such as I-War 2 where a rudder is vital. The build of the stick is of a high quality, although the unit is very light and has a tendency to tip slightly, especially if vigorous x-axis movement is used. The low price, however, makes it an attractive compromise between force-feedback and thriftiness.

PCPP	POWER				
	VALUE				
	EXTRAS				
















URL www.thrustmaster.com

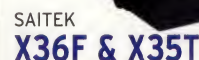
A truly versatile package, the Top Gun Afterburner should not be discounted because of its odd silver finish. A quality joystick.

GRAVIS
ELIMINATOR PRECISION PRO

URL www.accoaust.com

Finally, Gravis includes its unique Precision button which makes joystick movement more precise and responsive; useful for lining up that final kill. A competent but somewhat expensive stick.

PCPP	POWER									
	VALUE									
	EXTRAS									



URL www.techbuy.com.au

The supplied programming software enables full functionality with all leading flight sims, and it's rare that you'll ever run out of buttons for assigned tasks. However, the ergonomics of this stick makes it almost impossible to use for arcade games, although it proved very effective with 'fantasy' flight sims such as I-War 2.



GRAVIS
XTERMINATOR DUAL CONTROL

URL www.accoaust.com

However, the stick itself is of a very good quality and remains responsive and comfortable to use. Gravis seems unwilling to include a twist axis on any of its products; once again this stick has no rudder function. This stick is not recommended.

PCPP	POWER								
	VALUE								
	EXTRAS								



LOGITECH

WINGMAN FORMULA FORCE GP

DISTRIBUTOR	Logitech
PRICE	\$239
URL	www.logitech.com

This is an expensive peripheral, but comes jammed packed with just about every feature you could ever want from a wheel. Force feedback, four buttons on the face, gear change paddles and supple and responsive pedals. The grip has a rubberised coating making it very comfortable and immune to the slippage associated with sweaty plastic wheels.

Unfortunately at times force-feedback can be a curse just as much as a blessing, especially in games such as Redneck Offroad Racing where force-feedback is not particularly well implemented. The Formula Force GP does not automatically return to its centre position which makes steering a matter of continual correction and - for the unskilled - overcorrection.

Only four buttons on the front of the wheel is also limited compared to the other offerings in this PowerTest, and the force-feedback machinery within the column also makes the wheel feel somewhat heavy and a little sluggish, especially compared to the Microsoft wheel.

All in all an expensive wheel suited only for the cream of the racing crop where force-feedback is a must.

PCPP	POWER				
	VALUE				
	EXTRAS				



WINGMAN

STRIKE FORCE RUMBLE 3D

DISTRIBUTOR	Logitech
PRICE	\$79
URL	www.logitech.com

Gamepad design is a constant bone of contention. Take the Strike Force 3D, for example. While this unit feels big and clunky, after some hours of use the hands suffer no ill effects. The design of D-pad and button layout is comfortable and the two top index finger switches are also nicely placed. Overall response is very good. Mimicking the design of a console great such as the PlayStation controller was a good move on Logitech's part.

However, the feature list is probably a little too long for a PC gamepad. Two analogue sticks was too much for the PS and a functional use in the PC games landscape for both of them really escapes me. The rumble option is really just a poor replacement for force feedback.

But overall simplicity and super design make the Strike Force Rumble a strong gamepad.

PCPP	POWER				
	VALUE				
	EXTRAS				



MICROSOFT

SIDEWINDER PRECISION

DISTRIBUTOR	Microsoft
PRICE	\$119
URL	www.microsoft.com

For possibly the first time ever a Microsoft peripheral weighs in as the cheapest, with this bare-bones wheel undercutting both Logitech and Thrustmaster. Cheap, however, is not necessarily nasty as the Sidewinder Precision is well constructed of high grade plastic, has a very smooth mechanism, six buttons on the front of the wheel as well as gear change paddles and 'non-slip' pedals under the desk.

The wheel is sprung and so snaps back to the centre position after every corner. However, the spring is so tight that, even though control is improved for beginners, the experience of the Sidewinder Precision is necessarily more arcade than sim. In Colin McCrae Rally 2.0, for instance, the spring mechanism often caused errors in handling.

The plastic wheel also becomes rather sweaty and slippery after extended play, although the six buttons allow for extra versatility.

A basic wheel for quick-and-dirty arcade racing, the Sidewinder Precision should nevertheless prove adequate for most motoring needs.

PCPP	POWER				
	VALUE				
	EXTRAS				



GRAVIS

XTERMINATOR FORCE

DISTRIBUTOR	Acco
PRICE	\$189
URL	www.accoast.com

This is possibly the biggest gamepad on the planet. With 8 buttons and one "precision pad" on top of the controller and four buttons underneath, the options are wide open for all of your involved game choices. The precision button shifts the D-pad to high sensitive mode, for precise directioning.

This is basically an adult controller - it's extremely comfortable in my clumsy, oaf-sized hands but I can imagine a child being overbalanced by its impressive proportions! The underside keys are well-positioned and respond well. A cause for concern though is the D-pad. It rolls a little too freely for my liking and lacks a consistent centre position. This lack of response can be disconcerting.

The Xterminator Force is comfortable and will do the job fine but the price is inordinate. Fully featured and USB compatible this Gravis pad is a good option if the controller fits the hand (and the price your wallet).

PCPP	POWER				
	VALUE				
	EXTRAS				



THRUSTMASTER

FORMULA PRO DIGITAL

DISTRIBUTOR	Thrustmaster
PRICE	\$149
URL	www.thrustmaster.com

This steel-columned wheel is the largest tested here and takes up the most desk space, but correspondingly provides the most realistic driving experience. With a slightly wider wheel diameter, rubberised grip, four buttons and a separate gear stick, the Formula Pro Digital is suitable for both arcade racing and simulators alike.

The steel elements in the mechanism provide a superior steering sensation, and the return-to-centre spring is not as tight as on the Microsoft wheel, so the Formula Pro Digital feels a little less arcadey - important for games such as Grand Prix 3.

Having a separate gear-stick not only frees up the paddles behind the wheel for other uses - providing effectively six buttons - but also provides a more immersive and tactile driving experience. The pedals are responsive and feet rarely slip from the grips.

For those for whom the budget is tight and force-feedback is an unnecessary luxury, the Formula Pro Digital remains the wheel of choice.

PCPP	POWER				
	VALUE				
	EXTRAS				



MICROSOFT

FREESTYLE PRO

DISTRIBUTOR	Microsoft
PRICE	\$99.95
URL	www.microsoft.com

A good sized controller (a size down from the Xterminator Force), the SideWinder freestyle Pro is the closest to a console controller of all the PowerTest. Whatever else you say about consoles, their controllers reign supreme.

All of the buttons are easily accessible and require no contortion to reach. The simplicity of 8 buttons with one toggle for the D-pad (between analogue and digital) means the gamepad wins in the aesthetic stakes. The throttle is a nice touch and is easily accessible with either thumb. If not used, it is also unobtrusive.

The movement sensor option is almost useless - you move the gamepad itself around to control movement, with the D-pad acting as a hat switch but you should stick with a joystick for more involved games. Despite the odd design, with the buttons almost out of view, the SideWinder is a strong controller. Microsoft continues to impress in the peripheral stakes. Superb mid-priced gamepad.

PCPP	POWER				
	VALUE				
	EXTRAS				

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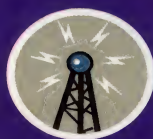
PLAYSTATION



MAC



PC-COROM



CHAT



SEGA



ARCADE



NINTENDO 64

SEEK TIME

WITH HIS TOTALLY LEGITIMATE MP3 COLLECTION GROWING DAILY, JACK KULYK DETERMINES WHICH DRIVE IS THE HARDEST

The speed of your hard drive is very important for gaming. In fact, it rates right after the Videocard, CPU, motherboard and RAM in determining exactly how fast your games are going to run. From this fairly cynical opening, we can see that the raw spindle speed of a HDD should not remain the only criteria for choice

We've taken a look at six drives; four IDE and four SCSI. The SCSI drives are here to show you the real advantage you get for the

massive capital outlay required to set up a SCSI based system.

In the IDE arena, two spindle speeds vie for supremacy. The cheaper 5400rpm drives, which, until now, have been typically larger, and the more expensive 7200rpm drives which offer faster seek times and corresponding shorter waits for data to be shifted around the system. Our benchmarks show that 7200rpm drives are definitely more powerful than their limping 5400rpm

brethren, and with more reasonable prices and equally large capacities do indeed seem now to be the drive type of choice.

As always though, the balance between price and capacity must be considered. Do you pay more for the superior 80Gb WD Caviar, or do you lean toward the huge capacity of the poorly performing Maxtor 100Gb? Is SCSI really worth the extraordinary amount of cash you need to set it up? This article should help you decide.

SEAGATE

U SERIES 80GB



This is the sixth iteration of the venerable Seagate U Series, a 5400rpm family of drives that place reliability and low price above blistering performance. The U Series no longer has a number denoting generation after it, but this would be number 6.

Even though this is supposed to be a budget drive, performance was far from shabby. In fact, the U Series even came close to its disappointing 7200rpm SCSI cousin, the Barracuda 180 in our real-world Winbench 99 high-end tests.

This two-platter drive has a 2Mb buffer and features Seagate's unique 'SeaShell' drive protection technology, a rubberised jacket for the drive that reduces the risk of damage from shock, reduces vibration and generally protects your drive from the usual knocks and nudges that can be encountered between LANs.

Seagate also boasts that this is the most reliable drive in the business, and for basic data storage you certainly can't go wrong with a U Series. If your boot drive is a 7200rpm beastie that's lacking on space, a U Series might just be the ticket, now combining decent performance with a generous amount of space; 80Gb is nothing to sneeze at.

For a safe and dependable drive that finds itself tasked with storing rare MP3s and valuable save games, the latest U Series remains a sensible choice.

PCPP

DISTRIBUTOR Seagate
PRICE \$594
URL www.seagate.com

87

MAXTOR

536DX 100GB



We had some high hopes for this drive, clocking in at a frankly astounding 100Gb, enough space to keep even the junkiest of DivX junkies happy for at least a month. Sure, it's only a 5400rpm drive, but following the relatively strong performance of Maxtor's DiamondMax 60Gb 7200rpm model, we were expecting good things.

Unfortunately, this drive performs very poorly indeed, only slightly more than half the performance of the Seagate U Series. While seek times were on average, when asked to perform the various application based tasks that make up the Winbench 99 test, this drive all but choked, posting a distressingly low 8700.

While the 100Gb capacity is very attractive, this drive is really only suitable for storing low-demand data such as MP3s. Run games off this drive, or God forbid your operating system, and you will notice considerable increase in wait times. We found that Quake3 Arena actually took an extra ten seconds to load Q3DM17; multiply that by say twenty times a night, and it becomes very frustrating for you and your LAN-mates.

Don't be fooled by the 100Gb capacity. While this drive is an attractive backup or dumping-ground solution, it's extremely poor performance make it a poor choice for high end use, and that includes gaming.

PCPP

DISTRIBUTOR Maxtor
PRICE \$695
URL www.maxtor.com

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WESTERN DIGITAL

CAVIAR 80Gb



The undisputed king of this series of tests, the Western Digital Caviar 80 posted results that cement its position as top of the 7200rpm IDE heap. In the Winbench 99 tests it came in slightly ahead of the Maxtor Diamond Plus 60Gb drive, but offers an extra 20Gb of storage; welcome real estate indeed in these days of MP3 and DivX.

Interestingly enough, the Caviar 80Gb is aimed at professional use in workstations or even smaller servers where the advantages of SCSI don't outweigh the costs of moving to this platform. This of course makes it just perfect for demanding gamers.

These high capacity high performance drives are still quite expensive, as you can see from the price quoted here, but only a whisker above the U Series, and this drive represents an entire solution for a versatile gaming rig. This amount of capacity should keep you going for months, and the high levels of performance make the drive suitable for both booting and gaming alike.

In fact, this is currently the largest 7200rpm IDE drive available, and two of these running in a raid array is both cheaper and better performing than a single Seagate Barracuda 180 SCSI drive.

Following these tests, the Western Digital Caviar 80 has now been officially welcomed into the PCPP Beast, and becomes the new IDE hard drive of choice.

PCPP

DISTRIBUTOR Western
PRICE \$610
URL www.western.com.au

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HOW WE TESTED

Each of the drives was installed in the PCPP Leprechaun, our more modest system designed to reflect real-world performance. The IDE drives were installed on their own ATA100 channel and set to Master. For the SCSI drives, we used an Adaptec 29160 Ultra160 SCSI card and placed each drive in the first position. The drives were all set up with one partition using the maximum available drive space, and used the FAT32 file system. While we ran numerous tests to examine such things as seek time and data throughput, we believe the results from the Winbench99 High End drive benchmark are the most meaningful for day-to-day use. This benchmark simulates the disk access routines of a number of common packages a 'high-end' user might encounter. The reported score is an average of the speeds gained by the drive subsystem, and also takes into account the CPU being used and also the amount of RAM. So from this, we could have seen some performance increases if these drives had been tested on the PCPP WorkBeast rather than the Leprechaun, but for the average user, the results shown here will help you make a choice about which drive is best for you.

BENCHMARKS

TEST MACHINE The PCPP Leprechaun is: AMD Duron 800MHz, 256Mb PC-133 RAM, ASUS A7V133, Gigabyte GeForce2 MX, Guillemot MUSE.

WINBENCH 99 high-end workstation tests

SCSI IDE

SEAGATE CHEETAH 73GB (10000RPM)	24600
WESTERN DIGITAL CAVIAR 80GB (7200RPM)	20500
MAXTOR DIAMONDMAX PLUS 60GB (7200RPM)	20333
SEAGATE BARRACUDA 180GB (7,200RPM)	16600
SEAGATE U SERIES 80GB (5400RPM)	16200
MAXTOR 100GB (5400RPM)	8700

MAXTOR DIAMONDMAX PLUS 60 GB



This is a much better showing from Maxtor, with a strong result coming in only slightly behind the Western Digital Caviar. This 7200rpm drive clocks in at only 60Gb however, and these days you'll quickly start to feel the pinch of those missing 20Gb offered in the other drives.

The strong results position the DiamondMax Plus as a suitable candidate for a boot drive, and it will also considerably improve load times of particularly hard-drive intensive games. It's an ATA100 drive like the others reviewed here, and this also accounts for the good performance.

This is a very quiet hard drive, and even includes toggles to enable 'quiet mode' and 'quiet-performance mode', but this should not be a consideration before purchase, since even the most modest of heatsink/fan combos drown out most of the noise from this drive.

While it's a good performer, the higher price per megabyte and lower capacity means that this drive takes second place in the 7200rpm IDE stakes to Western Digital's excellent Caviar 80Gb.

This drive has been around for a while now, and was previously able to rely on its 60Gb capacity. However, with 80Gb drives now the norm, and 100Gb drives on the horizon, Maxtor now has to concentrate on providing the best balance of capacity, performance and price.

PCPP

DISTRIBUTOR Maxtor

PRICE \$585

URL www.maxtor.com

75

SEAGATE CHEETAH 73LP 73GB



A SCSI solution is an expensive and relatively complex way to run a file system, and it can be quite a fiddle to get Windows installed on a SCSI drive (the secret is to press F6 on boot, folks). However, if cash is no objection and the challenge of installing a SCSI card, figuring out which are the correct cables, and setting a myriad of jumpers is a suitably enticing one, considerable performance gains can be experienced.

The real advantage of SCSI though is the ability to daisy-chain up to fifteen drives on the one card; a far cry from the two drives per IDE channel. This allows limitless possibilities for those obsessed with owning an actual terabyte of data, and with the Cheetah 73LP you're 0.071 of the way there.

This drive was reviewed last month and now, like then, we found performance to be absolutely blistering. While the performance gains among the faster IDE drives could only truly be measured with the stopwatch of faith, the Cheetah 73LP considerably lowers load times in games, and Windows feels a lot more responsive.

Maddeningly expensive, complicated, massive, gleaming and silver, the Cheetah 73LP is only for enthusiasts and true believers, but if you can stomach the cost, the results are extremely sweet.

PCPP

DISTRIBUTOR Seagate

PRICE \$1978

URL www.seagate.com

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SEAGATE BARRACUDA 180GB



Did someone say four grand? Oh my sainted aunt! The whole point of SCSI, I would have thought, was that it canes IDE in the performance stakes. Price aside, initial impressions of the Barracuda 180 are very good; it takes a lot of negativity to get past 180Gb of storage. Buy 12 of these, and you have yourself a fabled terabyte.

There are three main negatives to this enormous drive, however. The first is the physical size. Rather than having a uniquely high areal density, the drive instead simply has extra platters. This means it will take up two drive bays.

Were it just a matter of abnormal size, then the Barracuda's massive 180Gb capacity could have saved it, but alas performance is not what we have come to expect from SCSI... or rather it is, but the days of the 7200rpm SCSI drive are just numbered, that's all. In fact, this drive only just edged out the 5400rpm U Series - a budget IDE drive! That's the second negative.

Finally, the price. At nearly \$4000, this out of pretty much every gamer's league. It costs about a quarter of this to buy two Western Digital Caviar 80s, get nearly as much space, and far greater performance.

Bragging rights associated with this product are attractive, but reality should prevail.

PCPP

DISTRIBUTOR Seagate

PRICE \$3813

URL www.seagate.com

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MICROTECH

BUDGET BEASTIE



DISTRIBUTOR Microtech PRICE \$2995 URL www.techbuy.com.au

Not only does this review introduce Microtech's excellent sub-\$3000 gaming beastie, it also introduces the new PCPP WorkBeast, a high end system, modelled on The Beast itself, against which all comers are judged. And we're pleased to see that this relatively inexpensive system from Microtech stacks up very well against our gaming behemoth.

We invited Microtech to submit another gaming system following the excellent performance in PCPP#62 of their Maverick PC, a \$5400 monster running on a DDR platform with all kinds of extra cooling fans and expensive extras. When budget is no obstacle, a PC should naturally perform well, so we challenged Microtech to repeat their performance, but shave a massive \$2400 off the price.

The system the company has delivered is very impressive, boasting an Athlon-C 1.2GHz, 256Mb of RAM and the Leadtek Winfast GeForce3 videocard reviewed last issue. You will recall we actually preferred the ASUS V8200 which now sits proudly in the WorkBeast, but this preference was only by a very small margin, and the Leadtek card has the advantage of being readily available so you won't have to wait too long for your beastie to be delivered.

Taking our advice

Building a budget PC, even on a generous \$3000, is all about compromise, so it is interesting to see where Microtech has decided to save and where it has decided to spend. It's good to know that Systems Integrators take the PCPP PowerTest seriously, as Microtech has supplied the 17" Samsung Syncmaster 753DF, the winner of the PCPP monitor PowerTest in issue #62. This remains an excellent and cheap monitor, offering perfect visual flatness and shaving a couple of hundred bucks off the price of a professional 17"

This has allowed for spending in other areas.

The system comes with a high-performance 7,200rpm Seagate Barracuda ATA III hard drive, a welcome addition. The only gripe with this drive is that it is a relatively small 20Gb - although this is only small compared to the drives featured this month on page 92.

Microtech has clearly decided to restrict space in exchange for speed, and this is a valid decision. You will probably want to buy another HDD as soon as your bank balance recharges, as 20Gb can get crowded very quickly these days.

The motherboard is the excellent ABIT KT7E, running on the still obscure KT133E chipset. This allows Microtech to save another \$100 or so, but still provide support for the 133MHz FSB Athlon inside. For some odd reason though, the motherboard had USB disabled by default, so make sure you check this in the BIOS.

No misnomer

The Budget Beastie - which is our term, not Microtech's, this fellow arrived unchristened - also includes two optical drives. A 12x DVD for the movies, and a 10x4x32 CD-RW for data backup. While this is a slower CD burner compared to some of the 16x and even 20x drives we have seen, it's unusual to find both DVD and CD-R in a system of this price, making the Budget Beastie a very complete package for which we would normally expect to pay upwards of \$4000.

Sound is handled by the classic SoundBlaster Live! Value. While there is no Dolby Digital 5.1 support on this card, 4 channel surround is handled by the obscure but surprisingly capable speakers included. All your gaming APIs, however, are amply catered for, with ever-important EAX and A3D support prominent.

As the benchmarks attest, performance cannot be faulted. A 3DMark2001 score over 5000 simply equals a very fast machine, and there is no game on the shelves today that the Budget Beastie can't chew up and spit out.

Oddly enough Microtech hasn't included a modem with this PC, but there is a PCI 10/100 ethernet card, making it ready for both cable internet and LAN gaming.

Finally, the typical build quality we have come to expect from Microtech continues even to this lower cost machine. While there are no specialised coolers, all cables and wires are securely tied back and kept out of harm's way. Grilles in the sides of the case also improve airflow, and two extra case fans keep everything crisp and oh-so fresh.

QUALITY RULES OK

What's truly impressive about both the Microtech systems we've seen so far is that whoever is designing these PCs clearly knows their stuff. The components used are of the utmost quality - for instance, the RAM is Kingmax, not the dodgy no-name stuff you might expect in a budget machine. Also, the inclusion of extra coolers, in this case two case fans, and the creation of excellent airflow through the system means your gaming will be more stable and should you feel the need to tinker with overclocking, half your work is already done for you. Kudos to Microtech - they're obviously gamers just like us!

SYSTEM SPECS

■ PROCESSOR	AMD Athlon-C 1.2GHz
■ RAM	256Mb Kingmax PC-133
■ MOTHERBOARD	ABIT KT7E, VIA KT133E
■ VIDEO	Leadtek Winfast GeForce3 TD
■ OPTICAL	12x DVD, Mitsubishi 10x CD-RW
■ STORAGE	20Gb Seagate Barracuda ATA III 7,200rpm
■ NETWORK	10/100 PCI ethernet adaptor
■ MONITOR	17" Samsung 753DF
■ EXPANSION	6x PCI, 1x ISA, 2x USB, 2x serial, 1x parallel

BENCHMARKS

TEST MACHINE The PCPP WorkBeast is: ASUS A7V266, Athlon-C 1.4GHz, 256Mb DDR RAM, ASUS V8200 GeForce3, GameTheater XP, Adaptec Ultra160 SCSI, 73Gb Seagate Cheetah 73LP 10000rpm HDD

3D MARK 2001 1024x768x32 (3D Marks)

WORKBEAST 5711

MICROTECH BEASTIE 5087

QUAKE 3 ARENA 1280x1024x32 (FPS)

WORKBEAST 101.3

MICROTECH BEASTIE 92.5

While the PCPP Beast and Microtech's own Maverick remain the dream machines, this \$3000 system is extremely impressive, and shows some shrewd design. The inclusion of a GeForce3 is extremely welcome, and hopefully sets a precedent among other manufacturers. If you can haggle yourself a free modem, this machine is little short of perfect. Stay tuned for the \$1500 challenge...

Anthony Fordham

PCPP

A complete solution for an excellent price. Absence of a modem is puzzling, but surely easy to fix

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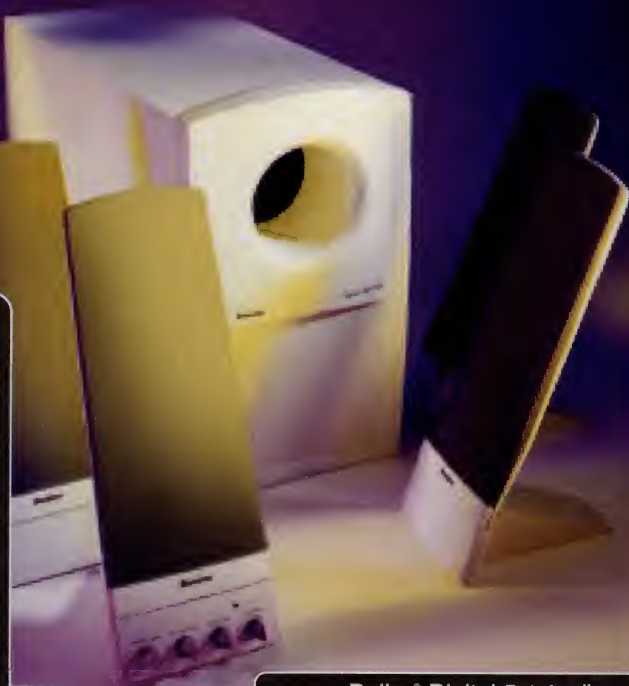
Boston

DOLBY
DIGITAL

HOME CAR MULTIMEDIA CUSTOM

ITS FATHER WAS
A \$5,000 HOME THEATER SPEAKER.
ITS MOTHER WAS A SUPERMODEL.

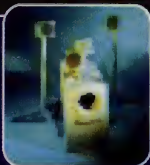
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Boston

Hotware Reviews

M-AUDIO

DELTA 44

DISTRIBUTOR The Electric Factory **PRICE** \$879 **URL** www.elfa.com.au

You may think that PC Powerplay has gone Breakout Box mad, but this is a card with a difference... no really. The Delta 44 is not a cheap soundcard, but it can do a lot more than most, and is bundled with more software than this reviewer has had hot dinners.

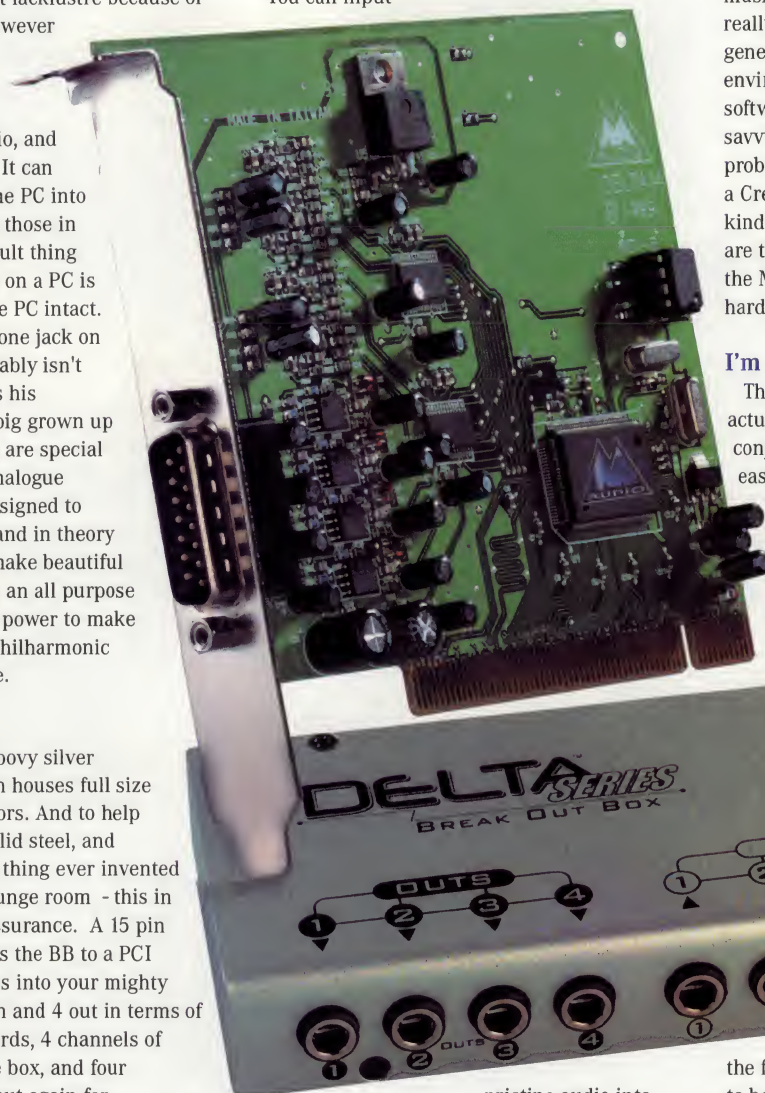
Okay, first things first, this card is not for everyone. It's a fully featured stereo audio card, and will work fine for gaming. But the gaming performance is somewhat lacklustre because of a lack of API support. However the real power and potential of this card lies in the fact that it is capable of recording audio, and mixing it up on your PC. It can effectively turn your home PC into a music workstation. For those in the know, the most difficult thing in the world of recording on a PC is getting the signal into the PC intact. Let's face it, the microphone jack on the average SB Live probably isn't where Eric Clapton plugs his microphone into. In the big grown up world of recording, there are special high quality Digital to Analogue Converters. These are designed to preserve sound quality, and in theory should allow any PC to make beautiful music. Confused yet? It's an all purpose sound card, but with the power to make your PC sound like the Philharmonic orchestra if you so desire.

Natural Rhythm

The card includes a groovy silver breakout box (BB), which houses full size instrument jack connectors. And to help out, the BB is made of solid steel, and probably is the sturdiest thing ever invented for use in the average lounge room - this in itself is a good quality assurance. A 15 pin D-Sub style port connects the BB to a PCI card which of course goes into your mighty machine. The BB has 4 in and 4 out in terms of connectivity. In other words, 4 channels of audio can be put into the box, and four channels of audio come out again for simultaneous play back. This card would be ideal as your first step into the world of professional audio. If you are an aspiring Norman Cook or Bono, then this may be the ticket for you. The BB works at a full 24bit 96Khz record / playback (CD quality is 16bit) which allows pristine sound input into your PC. It's compatible with just about all software for

basic sound reproduction, and when it comes to connecting with audio programs, it uses the PC industry standard ASIO. The software bundle is comprehensive to say the least; it includes Logic Audio Delta (a specialised version of the popular recording and sequencing software) Gigasampler LE, Unity Piano, Retro Lite (Analogue synthesiser), Sonic Foundry Acid 2.0, and a swag of demo plug-ins for Logic Delta. Its flexibility is probably its greatest strength.

You can input



pristine audio into your PC and mix up your home CD collection. Foster and Allen megamix anyone? (*Quelle horreur!* - Ed) You could, quite conceivably record a smaller home band or production. This is the target market. Included within Logic Delta is the ability to add and work with AVI files, so you could also dabble in home MTV shenanigans. In other words, if you are a bit of a creative,

IT'S HEADPHONE-A-LICIOUS

To thoroughly test out this card you really need a good way to check the output quality. In the world of professional audio, you can pay thousands for what's known as reference speakers. The best solution for the home studio however, is the humble set of headphones. In the case of this card, we bench tested it with the lovely Sennheiser HD 265 Linear Headphones. These are as near to a religious experience your average gamer will get while playing ANYTHING. Nothing short of excellent, and unlike the Delta 44 these puppies are suitable for general music listening and a spot of Quake 3.

musical type then the Delta 44 is probably a really good option. This is definitely not a general use audio card. In other words NO environmental audio, or general 3D positioning software. To have this card and another, gamer savvy card, running side by side is not a problem. That it runs seamlessly side by side to a Creative Vibra 128 is another suggestion of the kind of quality that we are looking at here. Gone are the days of IRQ juggling! It's a simple trip to the Multimedia control panel to switch between hard kore gamer and hard kore music guru.

I'm a Disco Fool!

The only niggle with this card is that the actual setup of the Logic Delta software to run in conjunction with the actual PCI card isn't the easiest in the world. Only after a spot of trawling through the online manual, did this reviewer find out how to make the 24 bit joy spew forth from his headphones. Apart from this, the quickstart manual included was excellent and overall this was

a painless introduction to audio recording and production on the home PC. The fact that digital output and input is missing is not a heinous oversight, the next model up

(The Delta 66) includes

the feature for those who need it. You really need to be a power user of your PC to get the most out of this, and a user who really demands quality, you won't be disappointed if you are after a sub \$1000 foray into the world of professional audio.

Nathanael Jeanneret

PCPP

A bit specialized for some, but pure excellence for the budding muso, and simply oozing quality

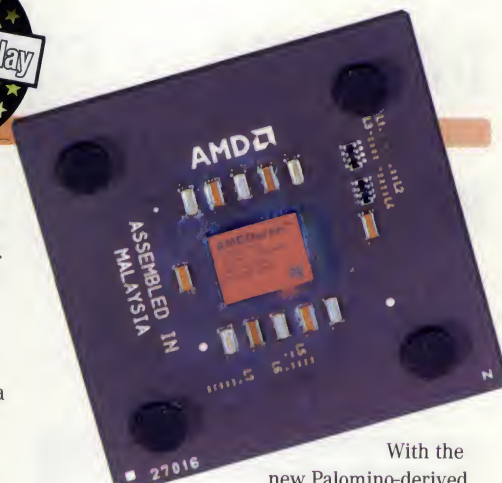
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AMD

DURON 950MHZ

Distributor AMD

Price \$200



With the new Palomino-derived

Duron core (known as Morgan) waiting in the wings, the 950 may be the final Duron utilising the Spitfire core. The Morgan promises lower operating temperatures and higher clock speeds. However, with the 1.1GHz Duron planned for the end of this year and the 1.2GHz version for early next year, there is enough life in the Duron to ensure that it'll keep kicking for some time to come.

Michael Wu

PCPP

When it comes to price and performance, the Duron remains king of the hill.

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BENCHMARKS

TEST MACHINE ASUS A7V133, 128Mb PC133 SDRAM, 32Mb Geforce2 MX, Win98 SE.

QUAKE 3 ARENA 1024x768x32 bit colour

DURON 700MHZ 58.2

DURON 950MHZ 58.3

3DMark2000 1024x768x32 bit colour

DURON 700MHZ 3137

DURON 950MHZ 3209

unchanged. The 200MHz EV6 bus and 192k of cache, while seeming a little dated, still make it a force to be reckoned with in the value market. And more importantly, it's still good for games. So good that it's almost impossible to recommend anything else when it comes to purchasing a sub-gigahertz processor. In the benchmarks it can be seen the Duron 950 has a small, but still evident advantage over a lower clocked Duron. Although the performance increase is quite minimal, clock-for-clock it'll still be able to plaster the Celeron and remain competitive with the P3 - for the price, it's a very good thing.

Being the naughty monkeys we are, attempting to run the processor faster is an integral part of the testing process. After joining the L1 bridges with a trusty 5H pencil, we managed to crank the chip to a substantial 1.1GHz with the aid of a little voltage tweaking. Any higher and the system would scream in a spasm of scary BIOS and system file errors. While not entirely impressive, an extra 150MHz is still better than nothing. And it does put it over the crucial 1GHz mark.

HERCULES

GAMESURROUND FORTISSIMO II

Distributor Guillemot 02 8203 1818

Price \$129

URL

www.hercules.com

The kindly folks at Hercules have seen fit to re-release the Gamesurround Fortissimo, and so we have another offering from a company that is taking an increasing share of the soundcard market. Which is a very good thing judging by the products that we have seen recently. The GSF2 is compatible with all the major sound API's and includes a few features that make it an interesting option for the budget conscious. For starters, the inclusion of optical in / out allows for connectivity to toys such as portable MP3 players, minidisc players &c. A good inclusion this time around is the dedicated headphone output, which hasn't really been on that many cards of this price range before. Unfortunately, you cannot run headphones and the speakers at the same time, which is a little irritating.

Because of the presence of the optical ports



the usual connectors for speakers and the microphone line-in have been put on a 4-way cable, that connects via a multi-pin connector. The multi-pin connector is obviously used because of space concerns, however it does seem a little flimsy, and you need to handle it pretty carefully when moving your PC about. That in itself is a reason for LAN gamers to look elsewhere for their next soundcard. You can see that Hercules is trying to pack in an awful lot in the "bell and whistle" department both in terms of features and the excellent software bundle. The comparative volume at line level for the CD seems significantly lower in volume than wav files. On further inspection, the volume control for the speakers has two separate controls within the interface; this is all very annoying. The overall difference in line level CD output is pretty off-putting, but this level difference is not present in the headphone out.

Overall, Hercules have put together a very strong package, and the price point that this card comes in at is going to ensure that this is a very competitive product. However, for the serious gamers out there the sturdy Hercules Gametheater XP makes for a stronger choice. The Fortissimo certainly blitzes its nearest competition the SB Live! in terms of features, but we feel that in terms of quality the SB Live! still pips the new Gamesurround Fortissimo II in a very close race.

Nathanael Jeanneret

PCPP

A contender, but lacking slightly compared to the basic SB Live! model. Optical ports most welcome at this price

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Hotware Reviews

PALIT

DAYTONA GEFORCE2 MX400

Distributor SATO

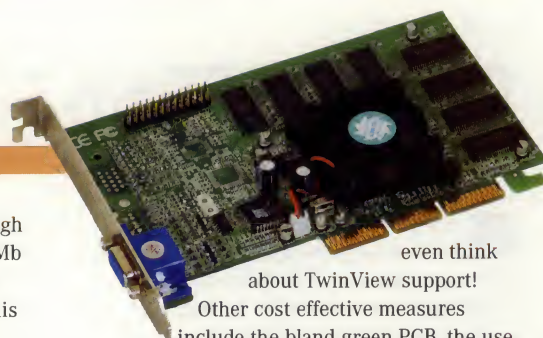
Price \$169

Palit is a small company that manufactures inexpensive graphic card solutions. The new Daytona Geforce2 MX400 continues this trend and, retailing at a mere \$169, there are no doubts about its budget nature.

The new MX400 is similar to the original MX. The most notable difference is the increase in

core speed from 175MHz to 200MHz. Although many MX400 cards come equipped with 32Mb of SDRAM, Palit has chucked on a generous 64Mb. These changes tend to suggest that this new card would have a slight performance increase over its older cousins, but certainly no speed records are set to be broken. Besides, the bottleneck for GeForce based cards is usually the memory bandwidth and with no improvements in that department expectations cannot be too high. On a Duron 850MHz machine the Daytona card managed to pull 59.6 fps in Quake3 at 1024x768x32-bit colour, a trivial increase of 1.3 fps over the vanilla MX. Quake3 is not the most texture intensive game around so the larger 64Mb memory may not have helped the Daytona all that much in the benchmark. The 3DMARK 2000 benchmark returned a score of 3233 in the same resolution, an 80-point increase over the original MX.

There are slight drawbacks from buying a budget card rather than a 'leading brand'. First thing we noticed is that the Daytona is very bare-boned. It comes equipped with only a single VGA port with no TV or DVI outputs so don't



even think about TwinView support! Other cost effective measures include the bland green PCB, the use of "ViGOUR" memory rather than well known brands such as Samsung and Hyundai, a shaky looking little sleeve-bearing fan on top of a barely undulating heatsink (Undulating? - Ed), and the inclusion of an extremely lacklustre CD. If you're one of those people who overclock their video cards, show off their PC with perplex windows and neon lights, and have strong affections for crappy bundled software then this card is clearly not for you. However if gaming is all that you're after and you have no need for fancy new-fangled features, then this little beast becomes a very worthy purchase. At a selling price that puts many MX200s to shame, there is no better place to use the words 'value for money'.

Michael Wu

PCPP

The Daytona Geforce2 MX400 is cheap, hard and fast. Did we mention it's cheap?

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BENCHMARKS

TEST MACHINE Duron 850MHz, Abit KT7, 128Mb PC133 SDRAM, Win98 SE

QUAKE 3 ARENA 1024x768x32 bit colour

ASUS V7100 GF2 MX 58.3

DAYTONA MX400 59.6

3DMark2001 1024x768x32 bit colour

ASUS V7100 GF2 MX 3153

DAYTONA MX400 3233

SOYO

SY-K7VTA PRO

Distributor Sato Technologies

Price \$239

URL www.soyo.com.tw

The SY-K7VTA PRO is another fully featured socket A motherboard in an already crowded market, so why look at this model? If nothing else, the price! The Soyo brand name is relatively obscure and this is something that any prospective buyer must consider, but it is certainly a promising product. Breaking it down, the KT7VA PRO has 1X 4XAGP, 5XPCI, 1 X ISA, 3 X DIMM, and ATA100. The board is based on the high-performance KT133A chipset. This chipset is normally reserved for higher end motherboards, like Abit's excellent KT7A. The obligatory AC97 onboard sound has also been included.

The overall build quality of the SY-K7VTA PRO is pretty good, but it's always a little hard to get excited about a motherboard with a sub-standard manual. The tiny little manual doesn't give the beginner system builder much of a chance of putting together a system by themselves. It is worth mentioning that a full manual is available on the motherboard CD.

A minor frustration is the placement of the

capacitors right next to the CPU socket; when placing a larger heatsink on it, there is very little room to operate. This is probably more concerning for the users who like to replace and play around with their heatsink combo, and is especially relevant to overclockers, and folks who use heat sinks with a bigger footprint. A prime example of this is ThermalTake's Chrome orb. On the topic of heatsinks, Soyo have gone the extra mile, and put a fan on the VIA controller heatsink. Hopefully this will translate to extra stability when overclocked and help with general airflow. The CPU frequency is set within the BIOS.

There are a lot of reasons to recommend the SY-KT7VA PRO, among them are excellent build



quality, and solid performance on alternate systems. Lesser-known manufacturers need to go the extra distance to break into a closed market. So gone all out, and for the price you get a very competitive board. For the budget system builder it is hard not to recommend this model.

Nathanael Jeanneret

PCPP

A sensible option for the budget conscious, Soyo looks like a brand to remember

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Hotware Reviews

MITSUBISHI

DIAMOND VIEW 1995SL

Distributor Mitsubishi Electronics Australia Price \$799 URL www.mitsubishielectric.com.au

Previously in PowerPlay, we've concentrated on high-end large monitors, such as the Philips 201P still fronting up the PCPP Beast. These monitors commonly retail at over \$2000 and even their more modest 19" cousins will set you back the best part of a grand. However, there are numerous cheaper low-end models available that will save you a bushel of cash, but still provide the extra screen real estate the power user craves.

The 19" Diamond View 1995SL is a staunchly vanilla-flavoured monitor with none of the fancy flat-screen extras you might expect from the hoity-toity high cost models. The screen is curved both horizontally and vertically, but does offer an 18 inch viewable area. The dot pitch is 0.26 which equates to a pleasingly crisp image right up to the maximum resolution of 1600x1200.

Factory preset resolutions have a maximum refresh rate of only 85Hz, which while stable may give cause for some concern for those users working under fluorescent lights. However, it's possible to manually set the monitor to higher resolutions, with 1024x768 supporting a maximum of 118Hz and 1280x1024 supporting

88Hz. The maximum supported refresh rate at 1600x1200, however, is only 76Hz.

This is cause for some concern, since the whole point of a 19" monitor is to be able to run at this high resolution. A 17" screen will easily handle 1280x1024 and most even support 1600x1200 albeit at an eye-melting 60Hz. Mitsubishi's factory default at 1600x1200 is only 65Hz, which makes running the desktop at this resolution quite a chore.

Beyond resolutions and refresh rates, performance is excellent. The image is bright and clear, and colour reproduction is very good. Our game tests, including Q3A and Redneck Offroad Racing (hey it was all we had) definitely saw the benefit of the bigger screen, and in the middle of a furious deathmatch at 1600x1200, the lower refresh rate is barely noticeable. And you're saving upwards



of \$300, which can instead be sunk into a GeForce2 Ultra which will at last be able to perform to its true potential on this monitor. But remember thrift comes, naturally, at a price, with the 1995SL otherwise only performing to a level normally associated with 17" screens.

Finally thought, if you need the space, but can't stump up the cash, the Diamond View 1995SL is a bright and cheery addition to any budding Beast.

Jack Kulyk

PCPP

An able rather than spectacular performer, but at this price having the extra space is probably worth it

81



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THE BEAST

THE ULTIMATE RIG

Now, word has it a lot of you are out there whinging for some kind of budget beast, a pitiful, sub-\$3000 machine that may look good in favourable light with a stiff tailwind but in reality has no chance to impress the opposite sex. This is the PCPP Beast, folks, the most powerful gaming rig sensible money can buy, built for speed, endurance and with a healthy dose of Feng-Shui. Don't dis the Beast people. Bad things happen to blasphemers.

Panasonic 16x DVD-ROM

DISTRIBUTOR Panasonic
PRICE \$180
URL www.panasonic.com.au

The Beast is nothing without DVD. With DVD, all the cinematic greats from Bram Stoker's Dracula to the seminal Biker Chicks in Zombie town come alive on your massive, crisp-as-crisp-can 21" monitor. And this drive from Panasonic fits the bill beautifully. Sporting the ability to read DVD-RAM, there's nothing it won't do. Tests show it will even make Jim Carey funnier.



TDK VeloCD 16x Burner

DISTRIBUTOR TDK 1800 651 917
PRICE \$599
URL www.tdk.com.au



At last the mighty Yamaha has been toppled by this admittedly ugly duckling. With a brutish 16x burn rate, the TDK VeloCD makes duplicating a brace of Bros simplicity itself, and the inclusion of BURN Proof technology - a feature sorely lacking on the Yamaha - ensures not one of those valuable CDs will go to waste. Works best with Black CD 16x Media from CAPAX (02 9648 4977) which not only look the business, but are black. Black good.

ASUS A7M266

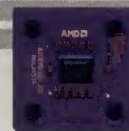
DISTRIBUTOR Achieva
PRICE \$415
URL www.achieva.com



Sure the benefits of a DDR platform have shown to be somewhat dubious for the budget-minded but this is The Beast! In any case, besides DDR functionality, the A7M266 is also an overclocker's delight, allowing you to squeeze even more pain out of the Athlon-C 1.4GHz with a mere fiddle of the bios.

Athlon-C 1.4GHz

DISTRIBUTOR AMD Australia
PRICE \$500
URL www.amd.com.au



The simple fact of the matter is that AMD gives gamers more choice, better value, and more all-round grunt. This 1.4GHz Athlon-C has an FSB of 266MHz and is just perfect for a DDR platform such as The Beast. It's a brisk little bugger though; we recommend a big fat Global Win WBK38 fan to keep everything frosty and most importantly, fast.

Gametheater XP

DISTRIBUTOR Guillemot 02 8303 1818

PRICE \$329

URL www.hercules.com

It still rules. This funky blue metal delight offers all the functionality of the ubiquitous SoundBlaster Live! Platinum 5.1 including EAX and A3D support, has a built in Dolby Digital 5.1 decoder, and hardware MP3 decoder, four USB ports for extra lovin' and it looks so slick people often mistake ours for a piece of professional gear. And unlike pretty much everything else in The Beast, it's relatively cheap.



Boston Digitaltheater6000

DISTRIBUTOR Hi-Fi & Video Marketing

PRICE \$1399

URL www.bostonacoustics.com

We've copped a lot of flak for our continued championing of this fine speaker setup, but we will not be moved. It's powerful, it's stylish, it will rock your world. Gaming with this setup is like nothing you've ever experienced - unless of course you already own one. Thundering base, subtle treble, not too much midrange loss, even SNES emulators sound good through this.



Lian Li PC-60 Aluminum Case

DISTRIBUTOR ELSA

PRICE \$299

URL www.elsa.com.au

Another long-time stayer in The Beast, this case is yet to be superseded. There are a number of other options from the same manufacturers, catering to three different tastes depending on how you like your power button. Ten disc bays, three extra fans, and thanks to thumbscrews, the whole lot can be broken down in less than five minutes.

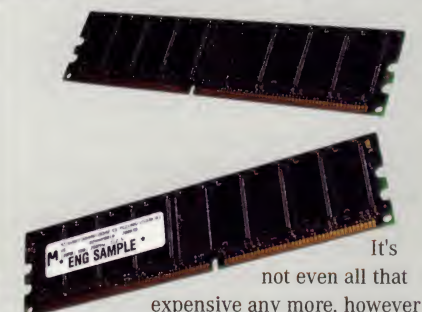


256MB DDR RAM

DISTRIBUTOR Kingmax

PRICE \$250

URL www.kingmax.com.au



It's not even all that expensive any more, however market research suggests you're better off buying one 256Mb module rather than two 128Mb sticks, especially as the A7M266 only has two slots for RAM. Once again, we can't stress enough how important it is to have 256Mb. Even if you reading The Beast is just daydreaming, go and buy 256Mb of RAM. Any RAM! It will change your world.

2 x 80Gb Western Digital Caviar

DISTRIBUTOR Westan

PRICE \$595

URL www.westan.com.au

We've caved to popular pressure and clear thinking and put the blisteringly fast Cheetah X15 back on the shelf for a while in favour of a much more reasonably priced IDE drive. As our recent tests indicate, this is the fastest, most powerful IDE drive good money can buy, and 160Gb should be enough for anyone. Even Britney fans.



ASUS V8200 GeForce3 Deluxe

DISTRIBUTOR Achieva

PRICE \$895

URL www.achieve.com.au

The market is limited and choice is difficult, but repeat exhaustive testing showed the ASUS V8200 to be slightly ahead of the few other GeForce3 cards we've tested in the PCPP Tech Bunker. In any case, this is a Deluxe model with all kinds of TV-out shenanigans, and it goes for the same price as many 'plain' GF3 cards. Fantastically fast in any case, with a 3DMark2001 score of 5711 in The Beast, without overclocking.



Philips 201P Monitor

DISTRIBUTOR Philips Australia

PRICE \$2295

URL www.philips.com.au

We mourn the FD Trinitron here in the PCPP Tech Bunker, for its reign has ended. In its place comes a new overlord, a 21" Monitor of such beauty, such crystal clearness, such elegant style, such a good price and such a short picture tube that it can fit into the most modest of student bedrooms. Love it tenderly, and it will treat you, as they say, grouse.



Logitech Cordless Freedom Navigator

DISTRIBUTOR Logitech

PRICE \$229

URL www.logitech.com

Unchain your heart! Or at least unchain your keyboard. With all the kit the Beast includes, you'll end up with a huge ugly snarl of cables behind your desk. The Cordless Freedom Navigator eliminates at least one potential deathtrap (use your imagination) and the soft-as-silk keys make typing a 40,000 word thesis on Post-Structuralist Feminism an absolute breeze. First class honours every time! Also good for Quake3.



Microsoft Wheelmouse Optical

DISTRIBUTOR Microsoft

PRICE \$99.95

URL www.microsoft.com

While the big silver Intellimouse Explorer certainly looks nice, we find the key word here is big. It's too big. But this little fellow is just right. An optical sensor means you'll never have to scrape that revolting black gunk off the inside ever again, and a USB connection means your lightning reflexes will now be fairly reflected in your next game of Tribes 2.



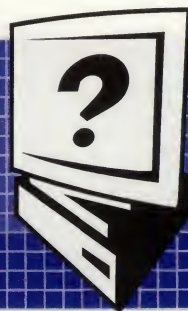
TOTAL BEAST VALUE

\$8085

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WRITE TO

SETUP

PC PowerPlay
PO BOX 634
Strawberry Hills
NSW 2016
setup@pcpowerplay.com.au

When you write remember to include as much pertinent information as possible. Send your CONFIG.SYS and AUTOEXEC.BAT and any associated *.INI files for Windows that might tell me more about your problem. Give me as detailed an explanation as you can and be sure to include as much detail as possible about your PC.

Feel free to email your questions or, if you want to snail mail, please remember to write clearly or better still print your letters. Please note that due to the volume of messages we receive, we cannot guarantee a response to all of your queries.

Q> DRIVING ME CRAZY

I have a 32MB Creative Labs Geforce Pro DDR board and about fifty percent of the games I throw at it lock up at random. I am running a Pentium III 700MHZ FCPGA processor with a riser card in an AOpen AX6BC Slot 1 motherboard. I have tried changing every setting within my knowledge and still no joy. When I put in a Diamond Viper V550 everything works fine. Is this simply a compatibility issue with certain games or is it the case that this card is not going to be happy with certain configurations of motherboard, sound card etc? If this card is so incompatible with this many games, it wasn't a very good buy. Both these video cards use the same drivers. Any ideas?

David

A> It's extremely unlikely that the motherboard and video card combo is giving you grief. You

first need to open up your case, to make sure you don't have a heat dissipation problem. The G-Force cards generate an awful lot of heat and this may also be causing your system instability. I'd suggest that you try out the current version of the Detonator drivers available on the nVidia web site, rather than using the Creative drivers, or try using the Creative ones if you are using the Detonator driver set. The last resort is trying your card in another system to determine there isn't something physically wrong with your existing card.

Q> CAN'T COPY

I recently forked out the cash and got a new computer. Everything works fine except the network. The computer sees all the other computers, I can play LAN games fine and people can take files off my system. I just can't copy files from other people's computers to mine. I can usually get away with a few MB before the computer freezes up. An annoyed, angry hit of the reset button is the only way out. There is no blue screen of death or any other messages. It just freezes. I think the problem has something to do with the ATA 100 configuration of the computer. If the drive is moved out

and put in a normal IDE slot, everything seems to work fine.

Bob

A> Okay the problem here is your little ol' Network card, try moving it to another PCI slot.

There appears to be a resource conflict. The next thing to do is to make sure you have the correct ATA100 drivers installed in Windows.

Q> DVD VOLUME

Could you please tell me why DVD movies playback on all PCs I've tried with very low sound levels? The extent of the problem varies between computers and DVD titles, but is always noticeable. If I watch a DVD then play a game or anything, the game volume is 3 times that of the movie just viewed. With some titles I have to crank the volume up so loud I can hear nasty hissing and warbling effects. I have checked every hardware and software volume control I can find. Does this happen with everyone? Is there anything I can do about it?

Peter

A> The difference that you hear is because there are differing standards of what exactly constitutes line level signal. Because of the many variances in production, mixing & decoding, the words 'line level' vary in meaning from one studio to another. Because of the way that DVD audio is mastered it doesn't handle much more line level volume increase before it needs amplification. In other words, the better the pre-amp in your amplifier, the better the quality of the amplified sound. It's also worth knowing that the digital soundtrack which is lifted off the DVD is then converted to analogue in your soundcard, so the quality of the output on that card will also affect the quality of the overall sound. Because DVDs are mastered at different levels (this optimum level is known as Nominal) you have to drive your amplifier harder to get the same level that you get out of your PC in normal games. Thus you get the ambient and system noise turned up as well.

For more information on general DVD

knowledge try: <http://www.faqs.org/faqs/rec-video/dvd-faq/>

Q> WHICH OS???

Hi, I've recently bought my new PC. It is an AMD 1333MHz, Asus A7A266, 32Mb Asus V7700 Dlx, 19" Auriga flat screen, 256Mb SDRAM 133Mhz, 40Gb 7200rpm, 16x DVD, 32/12/10 CDRW, Game Theater XP 56k internal modem, 10/100 network card. I would like to know which OS is the best for my PC. I'm told Windows 95b is the fastest and others say Windows ME is the best. And that Windows XP will need 256mb ram just to run smoothly. I'm using Win 98SE and it isn't all that fast. I have drivers for everything. I really want the fastest OS which will support all my hardware to its fullest. Can you help?? And is Windows XP worth getting? I also have 2 sound cards, the Game Theater XP and the one on the motherboard. How do I make the Game Theater XP default and still use the joystick port on the other sound card? Another thing, will the detonator 3 drivers get rid of the slick utilities of Asus's v7700 deluxe?

MD Programmer

A> The OS which most gamers will find the easiest, and that has the most current hardware

support is Windows ME. The simple fact is that it has the most current in-built drivers for general usage, and among other things has optimized network encoding which means it works faster on the Internet. There is a strong argument for running Windows 2000 as a gaming OS, chiefly it handles memory a helluva lot better than any of the Win9x iterations, but requires a lot of tweaking to get running well for home / gamer usage. WindowsXP will be based on the core of Windows2000 professional, and if it makes an easy stable gaming platform, then yes it will be worth getting. You can expect PCPP to do a full roundup when we have it in our hot little hands.

Why do you want to use the port on the existing one? The Game Theater XP does come with a port on it for such things. You will definitely be able to install drivers for both cards. Then you can select in Control Panels / Sounds and Multimedia which sound card you

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NATHANAEL JEANNERET WAXES TECHNICAL



want to use for general output. To configure your joystick you should just select the game port you want to use and go ahead and use it.

Finally, the latest detonator drivers should only update the driver portion of your video card, it won't touch your lovely Asus utilities.

Q> QUICKIE

I have just purchased a new rig with an ATA100 HDD. It's working a treat on the primary IDE channel. My CD-ROM and burner are chained (master / slave) on the secondary IDE channel. If I add my old 4Gb IDE HDD as a slave to the new ATA100 drive, will it slow down the performance of the fast drive?

Paul

A> It won't slow down the access speed of the new drive, however it will affect the data throughput for that IDE channel. Basically the slowest device on the chain sets the speed. So if you put a crusty ATA33 drive on the chain then you are effectively limiting the data throughput in the channel to 33mb/second. The fact is that all these speeds are peak output and really only happen in a good day in the lab, in utopian conditions with a stiff tailwind. Most HDD's operating at around 7200rpm ATA100 are still lucky to peak 65mb/sec.

Q> IS IT WORTH IT?

Not long ago I bought a 40GB IBM Deskstar 7200 RPM hard drive which cost me around \$320. One week later my friend bought a hard drive also 40GB and 7200 RPM for \$250, it was either Seagate or Western Digital. My question is; are there any differences between the two? Or am I just paying an extra \$70 for a brand name.

Coffee guy

A> Yes, in effect you are paying for the IBM brand name. In fact most of the Western Digital 7200rpm drives that are floating around at the moment are coming with 4mb of on-board cache, and the Deskstar series have 2mb. That being said, the IBM Deskstar series have an excellent name

for reliability and speed, so I wouldn't cry too much!

Q> PC ABOUT TO TAKE OFF

I've had my computer for over two years and upgraded the processor from a Pentium 3 350 to a Pentium 3 550 and 6 gigs of HD to 40 gigs of HD. Anyway, since about one year ago when I start up the computer it makes loud whirring sounds. Now, I've stopped both the CPU and the power supply fans and that made no difference what so ever. I upgraded the hard drive to a 40 gig, but that was only a couple of weeks ago. I'm going bonkers because the noise is very disturbing and I'm worried the noise could deteriorate my hearing.

The noise itself is loud and sounds like it's coming from the HDD. Can you please shed some light on my problem. Also, I have a 56k modem and I'm connected to the same ISP as my friend (who also has a 56k modem). When he downloads a patch or anything, his download speed is around 5 KB a second, but mine is averaged at 2 kb/s. Can you help me again?

Nick

A> Yes it's probably your HDD, now the thing is here, you say you have upgraded your HDD? If you are still running your older one it's probably time to install an OS on the 40gb drive and copy the contents of the 6gb over and remove it from your PC. The only other device that is prone to make loud whirring noises is the CDROM drive. The best way to tell if it's your CD-ROM is by dropping a CD in it, and listening for the noises as it spins up. The CD drive should only make intermittent noises, and only when it's in use. By the sounds of things though, you need to get rid of that older HDD. Your modem access and download speeds can vary depending on a variety of factors. A good general rule is that, the closer you live to the city CBD the faster your Internet access will be. This is not because of the physical distance but rather that the exchanges and cabling in the centres of most towns are more up to date, and generally have more bandwidth available, and you are getting closer to the Internet

'backbone'. Another simple way to improve Internet performance is to be running either Windows ME or Windows 2000 as they both have improved Internet coding and consistently perform better than, say, an identical Win98SE machine for general net usage.

Q> DOORSTOP STOPPED

I am having trouble finding space on my doorstep's, sorry, 586's hard drive. And, no I have not been locked up in a dungeon for five years. However, one day I was carefully managing my hard drive space, 440mb, and the next day I looked again, and there was only 120mb. What's going on here? I have tried recompressing C: drive, but to no avail. I hope you can set my doorstep straight.

Tom

A> There are two ways to verify the size of your hard drive. The first way is to go into the BIOS, and within the HDD detection page should list the size. Failing that, take off the case and take a look at the sticker on top of the HDD, then take the model information and go to the manufacturer web site. Now you know how big it should be. Now, if sections of the HDD have become dysfunctional, Scandisk will mark them as bad sectors. You can tell this by running Scandisk, it will mark bad sectors as red. Scandisk marks these as bad and unavailable for Windows to use. This may explain the situation, and hopefully, Window's erratic behaviour. The other possibility is that you may have a virus hanging out in master boot record of your HDD. The way to sort this out is to run a virus checker with the most current definitions you can get. Then you need to boot into command prompt mode (as you are running Windows 95 all you need to do is use the shutdown menu, in Win98 you just press F8 as the PC is starting to bring up the boot menu.) Then you need to type
C:\windows\system <press enter> then type Fdisk /mbr <press enter>
If you have any resident nasties, this should sort you out. Beyond this, a clean install of Windows is next, but the old doorstep really is getting long in the tooth. Hint hint.

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

NATHANAEL JEANNERET WAXES TECHNICAL

Q> CPU CONUNDRUMS

I am the proud owner of a 1.2GHz Athlon, whoopee right? Well anyway, I was wondering, should I run it at 133mhz @ 9x or 100mhz @ 12x? I have tried both and there seems to be no noticeable difference, which one would you recommend? And does this change the mhztag (*His word, not ours - Ed*) for the ram as well? (128 pc133). On that note, the CPU temperature reaches up the high 50's at times, is this bad? The alarm is set to go off at 60 by default, what temp will it start to do damage?

Nug

A> You need to run it at 133MHz, that speed is the system bus speed, and as long as your motherboard supports 133MHz RAM, (which it should) then you will get the maximum throughput of your system. By running it at 100MHz then you are missing out on 33% of your RAM's possible throughput. In terms of temperature, the high 50's is not uncommon for the speedier AMD processors, it certainly won't do any damage at that temperature. At sixty degrees your system will start to become unstable, but this in itself isn't a major hassle. You will find that with sufficient cooling you should be able to get it down to around 40 degrees. I would suggest getting some thermal paste and either a ThermalTake Super Orb, or if you are feeling brave, one of the excellent WinFOP style fans. Be aware that those things can make more noise than a cat in a blender set to puree, so check with your vendor that you can take it back if it's too heinously loud.

Q> DIED IN THE ARSE

Which way should I go? I have a P3 800 gaming rig, with ASUS A7V133 Mother Board, 512Mb RAM & 32Mb TNT 2 Video card. What would be the best way for me to upgrade? Should I go get an insane Video card or should I loose the Pentium, save my pennies, and go for the AMD chip with a Motherboard? The machine was crazy when I brought it but as with all computer parts, it has died in the arse with the release of new technology. What would you suggest?

Dazz

A> Well it seems like quite a reasonable rig, for general gaming. For the purpose of this exercise I'll ignore the fact that you seem to have put down an A7V133 as your motherboard (as this is a socket A AMD only motherboard). To effectively upgrade your system as it stands, the most sensible option would be to upgrade your video card. I think you will find it a significant improvement in speed. There is no reason you can't take a more recent video card into your next system.

Q> SLEEPY GATE.

I presently have an Asus A7V, which I have had for around 6 months and has been nothing but trouble due to the 'wonderful' Promise 100 Controller. I bought this motherboard with a Duron 700 CPU as both were recommended by you. Right from the first installation I have had problems with my computer crashing, freezing sleeping and not waking up, etc. I have tried many things to fix it and spent many hours on the Internet reading other peoples fixes for the problem. I had it working reasonably well up until last week for about 2 months after installing Windows ME (I previously had Win98). Changing to better quality PC133 SDRAM (it still only runs at 100, but I believe that's because of the Duron chip). Installing BIOS version 5 and the latest Promise 100 controller (rebuild 40 or something), and ensuring the Promise controller was on IRQ 10 on its own. I had previously had to reload everything regularly as the computer got worse and worse each time after a few weeks. Even when running well, it would not start up properly after going into standby mode. The problems were often with Rundll.dll or DBserver.

Finally, after installing another 128 Mb of PC133 SDRAM the whole thing has collapsed completely and the computer only starts in 16 colours with no drivers running even though it is definitely not in 'safe mode'. The RAM was cheap (\$55) and only has blocks on one side as opposed to both sides with my original RAM (I'm not sure what this means). I don't know whether this caused the problem or the fact that I went fell asleep in front of it for 2 hours while Baldurs Gate II was playing!! Luckily I had

recently backed up my work data and save games on a CD. Anyway, I have given up and will buy myself a new motherboard and definitely not anything from ASUS even though you have recommended the A7M266. The reason for this letter is to beg you to print some solutions for all those people out there who are having the same problems.

Pain Lord

A> Yes the Promise ATA controller has been a bit of a thorn in the side for a lot of users, but it's important to point out that the Promise controller chips have been universally painful, on a large variety of motherboards. The first thing that you need to do is get the most current ASUS motherboard BIOS version. The problems with shut down are related to specific issues within the ACPI (BIOS and Windows power control) I'd suggest that you work through www.microsoft.com. This is also a common problem and computers not waking up and shutting down properly are about as common as, say, oxygen. One thing which you haven't mentioned is whether you have installed the VIA 4 in 1 driver pack (see box) That may well help you out.

Q> IT'S STILL A SONIIIIIE!!

I need your best advice on purchase of 19" monitor. Can you recommend a first and second choice brand for a good quality picture for games? I'm very much into flight and space sims. Currently I have three screens, the best is a Sony 17" flat, just need a bigger one. From what I read Sony is still king of the heap. I do have several high-end accelerator cards to choose from.

Stargaze

A> Yea verily I say unto thee, cast your mind back - way back - to PCPP#62. As we found with the Monitor PowerTest in the 17" department the Sony is king, and this is pretty much true in the bigger monitors. Yes that's right, we all love Sony here. A good solid second choice would be one of the lovely Mitsubishi 19 Natural Flats - these should see you clear. They have the same Trinitron tube. The professional level Philips monitors are pretty schmick too.

LETTER OF THE MONTH

LETTER OF THE MONTH WINS...

AN INCREDIBLE SIDEWINDER GAMEVOICE ONLINE COMMUNICATION PERIPHERAL COURTESY OF THE NICE PEOPLE AT MICROSOFT. HURRAH FOR THAT!

Q> LATEST DRIVERS TO BOOT.

I read with interest where we are encouraged to update our hardware Drivers regularly, however, sometimes I also read stories of how updates to the latest drivers actually make a system perform worse. Case in Point: the latest GeForce2 MX "Detonator 3" drivers. They bag them all over the Internet. I have the GeForce2 and it performs flawlessly and more than adequately. My Question is this: if I am happy should I leave my system alone or still upgrade because the real improvements are worth it? Should I ignore the reports I have seen? I have always trusted PCPP so your word is final <happy smile> Also, if your recommendation is to upgrade, which Detonator 3 drivers are most recommended to update to? (There are

so many around) Correct file name appreciated.

ROM

A> Yes, usually the most current drivers are the ones to go with. The reason that we get incremental driver updates is to provide to best, most recent support. Unfortunately, we sometimes get incremental upgrades and major upgrades that are buggier than the previous version, this is bit of a random thing, as when they release the patch to the general public sometimes bugs come out in the wash. We would never advocate ignoring everything you read on the net, but most of the time, unless you have strong evidence against its better to go with the most current software available. In the case of the Detonator



Microsoft

drivers, to get the most out of your video card you would do well to move to latest version, get it direct from www.nvidia.com, the current version is Detonator3 v12.41 for Windows 9x.

Q> DIRECT X 8.0A WON'T INSTALL.

I have been trying to upgrade to DirectX 8.0a, and every time it gets to the install part it stops (not responding) The current version I have is 4.7.1.3000, I am running this on Windows ME, AMD 1.2GHz, 256MB RAM, GeForce2 GTS. I am also running Norton's System Works Pro, virus protection etc.

Peter

A> This is important! Everyone pay attention here! You need to disable all virus protection when installing ANY software! It is probably the cause of most bungled software installs, it really buggers things up! It's critical that you do not have software like anti virus running when you are installing software. This is more than likely what your problems is.

each program but they all say the device message. I have looked into the device manager on the system bit in the control panel, but nothing is coming up as wrong. The second pop-up box states: The MSVCRT.DLL files is linked to missing export MSVCRT.DLL:??_U@YAPAXI@Z. I have run a couple of programs from Norton Utilities (System Doc, WinDoc) but these have done nothing. I have opened the MSVCRT.DLL file in notepad and there is a line where MSVCRT.DLL:??_U@YAPAXI@Z is in but I was reluctant to fiddle around with it as I don't know much about DLL files. Can you please tell me what is wrong and how I can fix it?

Benny

A> The reason you are getting these messages is that a file has been removed or installed that causes Windows to look for files that are either missing, replaced or

duplicated. The first thing to do is make sure that you don't have a duplicate of the file MSVCRT.DLL. If you do have a duplicate, move the most recently created one to a different folder, look for MSVCRT.OLD or MSVCRT.BAK - these are the kind of backup files that some programs will move your old files to as they install new components. You will need to move the MSVCRT.dll file and rename the *.bak or *.old file to MSVCRT.DLL. Failing this you need to replace the file from your Windows installation CDs. The file will be located in the system directory of your Windows CD, you just have to search for it and replace the faulty one. More often than not, when there are DLL problems they usually relate to programs that have been recently installed, so try to think whether you have installed anything around the same time as the problems started occurring.

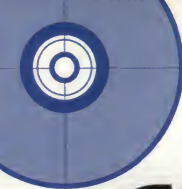
Q> DRIVER FILE PROBLEM #97,554,321

Recently an error crops up when some programs are executed, Napster is one of them. There are two pop-up messages that come up when the error occurs. The first one states:c:\Program Files\Napster\napster.exe A device attached to the system is not functioning. The file path is different for

TECHNICAL TIP

ESSENTIAL PERFORMANCE TWEAKS

The most common tweak that is absolutely essential is the VIA 4in1 motherboard driver set. Basically, this applies to all systems running with a VIA chipset on a motherboard. If you are not sure, check your motherboard model on its respective website or the manual. The patch fixes a variety of woes with the VIA based motherboards, and the difference it makes on some systems is nothing short of astounding. It can improve boot times for Windows ME by around 10 to 20 seconds for starters! It also fixes some issues with the AGP interface and some other essential things. You can download the patch from www.via.com.tw



CD POWERPLAY #64



HARRY'S INTRO

About the Game Demos and Movies...

Games require Direct X8 to run properly. Movies will only work if you have the right movie players installed on your PC. The ones you need are - Media Player 7.1, DivX Player and Quicktime 4. Lucky for you we've included them on the cd for you.

cdtech@pcpowerplay.com.au

Faulty CDs will be replaced free of charge. Send it (no postage required), together with a description of the error, to:

PC PowerPlay CD Returns

Reply Paid 634, 78 Renwick St

Redfern NSW 2016

DEMOS CD 1

ALONE IN THE DARK: THE NEW NIGHTMARE

Edward Carnby, the supernatural detective is back! And this time it's for revenge. Carnby's best friend, Charles Fiske has been found dead and it's your job to find out why. Throw in a few mysterious ancient tablets with the ability to unlock an incredible and dangerous power and you got a recipe that spells danger. Spooky stuff from Infogrames and our Spotlight demo of the month. Enjoy it alone!

EVERQUEST: SHADOWS OF LUCILIN TRAILER

This is a great movie giving you fly-by scenes of the new lands in the third expansion to this huge MMORPG title. Needs Quicktime to run.

DUNE GENERATIONS TRAILER

This is a soundless movie of the awesome online Dune strategy universe. Conquer worlds, secure your family name, and be chosen by the Emperor to become the Master of Dune.

CREATURES DOCKING STATION

Creature Labs Docking Station is a completely FREE artificial life game from Creature Labs, the creators of the Creatures series of games. To get Docking Station you first need to register and then install the game. Everything else is free.

INTENSITY X8

The makers of DemonStar bring you a side-scrolling arcade classic with more enemies, more weapons, and more fun than you can shake a stick at!

KYODAI MAHJONGG

Kyodai Mahjongg is a great version of the famous Mahjongg Solitaire (or Shanghai) oriental game. The rules are simple and the game is extremely addictive!

BACTERIA

Get ready to be miniaturised and injected into a patient's body to cruise his body in a craft to destroy a unknown virus in the body of a suffering scientist.

JOURNEY'S END

Crystal Interactive has released a demo of their 3D RPG Journey's End, which has both singleplayer and multiplayer capabilities set in an action-packed realm of magic and fantasy.

EMPIRE OF THE ANTS

This is a cool strategic demo as you play a empire of ants, and it's time for you to dominate as the ultimate species.

THE INCREDIBLE MACHINE: EVEN MORE CONTRAPTIONS

The award-winning legacy of The Incredible Machine series continues. This version combines brand new puzzles, a more entertaining head-to-head mode, the ability to swap puzzles with the world over the Internet.

TREAD MARKS

Tread Marks is an Off-Road Battle Tank Racing and Combat game. Unlike most off-road racing games, in Tread Marks you can actually put holes and scorch marks in the terrain. Ahhh what fun to be had..

GAMEPLAY CD1

HALF-LIFE DEATHMATCH CLASSIC MAPS

The client files in tribute to id Software and the contributions they've made to the action genre. Valve has created Deathmatch Classic for Half-Life, Quake deathmatch at its best within the Half-Life game.

RUNE CO-OP MOD

This huge mod allows you and up

to four other friends play the complete singleplayer game of Rune v.1.07. What you must have is the full retail version of Rune and the v1.07 patch.

DANCING BEAR WINAMP PLUGIN

Black & White dancing bear plugin, which features the Bear titan grooving to your own music!



DEMOS CD 2

SERIOUS SAM

This is the final out of test demo of this classic Doom style shooter extravaganza. This new demo is based on the v1.00 codebase but still includes the technology and Karnak levels that we've seen in the test demos. In case you didn't know Serious Sam is a high-adrenaline arcade-action shooter heavily focused on frantic arcade-style single player action. Join Sam as he travels through the beautiful world of ancient Egypt and several diverse planets, confronting countless Mental's minions on his way to the Mental's base. It's our demo of the month!

GANGSTERS 2

The Godfather of gangster sims is back! Gangsters 2 brings to life the organized crime world of Prohibition America, a time when violence and greed ruled in the race to become the boss of bosses.

TECHNOMAGE

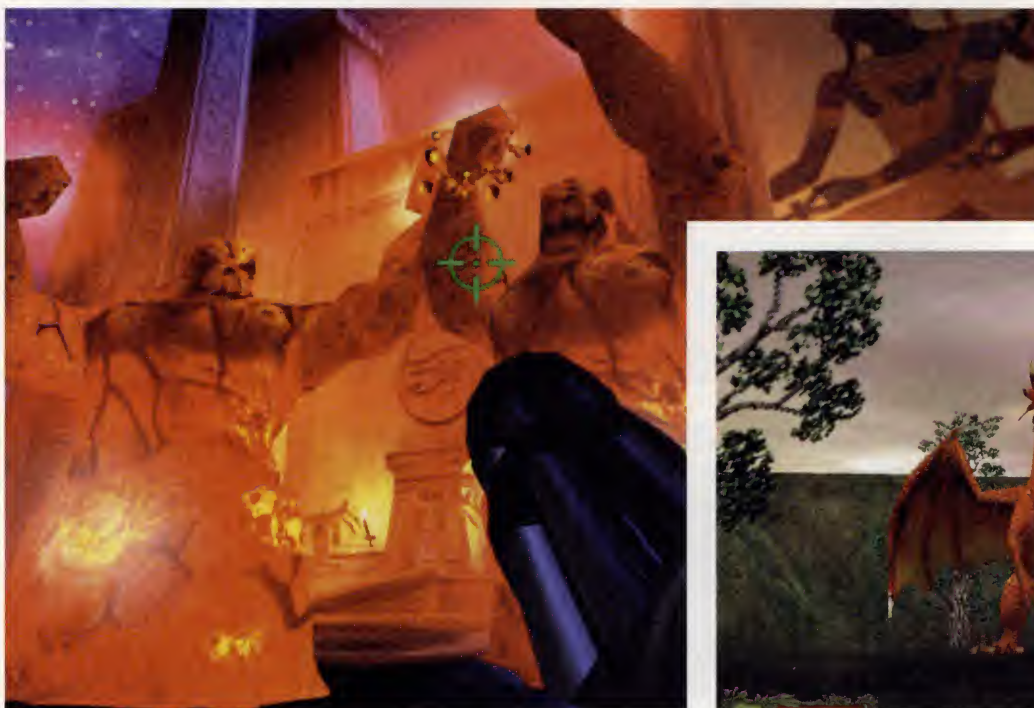
TechnoMage is a 3D action/adventure game. The world of Gothos is split and ruled by two factions: the Dreamers and the Steamers. Pick your side and get ready for some cool action.

REAL WAR

Real War is a commercially adapted version of the military game called Joint Force Employment, released exclusively to the military. The player can choose to be the US or the Independent Liberation Army (ILA).

LEGENDS OF MIGHT & MAGIC

Legends of Might & Magic takes you on a dark journey of struggle and conquest. In order to succeed, you must team up with other adventurers to halt the advancement of the opposing legion and rewrite history.



GAMEPLAY CD2

DESPERADOS: WANTED DEAD OR ALIVE WALKTHROUGHS

All the tips and tricks to get this game solved before high noon. It includes detailed maps and secrets you never new existed.

QUAKE 3 POINT RELEASE

The v1.29f point release for Quake 3 Arena contains a number of additions, improvements and fixes, including new maps, new network code and new weapon effects.

FALLOUT TACTICS PATCH

Join the brotherhood and patch up your version of Fallout Tactics. This patch has a ton of fixes in the GUI, missions, vehicle, sound, game engine, and multiplayer aspects of the game.

DIABLO II UPGRADE PATCH

Here is the latest released patch for Diablo II for Windows bringing you up to v1.08. This patch has all the fixes from previous patches also.

DEEP SPACE NINE: DOMINION WARS PATCH

The patch will address many issues including the one where the game crashes when anti-matter or nanotech bombs are transported to a planet.

GANGSTERS 2 PATCH

Fixes CD-ROM detection problems, multiplayer issues, Newspaper problems, and EAX disable feature.

NO ONE LIVES FOREVER PATCH

This patch fixes many multiplayer

problems with No One Lives Forever.

CLIVE BARKER'S UNDYING PATCH

This patch addresses known texture-related issues within the game. This patch will improve the games graphics so make sure you install it.

TRIBES 2 PATCH

This is the manual patch for Tribes 2, bringing your action packed team based shooter to version 22755.

STARCRRAFT BROOD WAR PATCH

Here is the latest build for StarCraft: Brood War in patch version 1.08b.

SUMMONER PATCH

This patch updates Summoner to version 1.21.

CONTROLS

ALONE IN THE DARK: THE NEW NIGHTMARE

Up - Up arrow
Down - Down arrow
Left - Left arrow
Right - Right arrow
action / fire - space
flashlight - s
run - a
inventory - i
map - m
radio - r
freelook - left shift
aim - left click

BACTERIA

accelerate UP	W or CURSOR
decelerate DOWN	S or CURSOR
roll left CURSOR LEFT	A or
roll right CURSOR RIGHT	D or
direction control Joystick or mouse	
fire HX-4	1
or left mouse	
fire locked torpedo	2
or left SHIFT or RETURN	
target enemy/object SPACE or right mouse	
emit ECM wave	E or
left STRG or right STRG	
view price list (hold)	B
pause game	P
hide cockpit	H
exit mission	ESC

TECHNOMAGE

Action (use weapon, interact with surrounding, talk, open doors) Left mouse button
Walk (hold it pressed) Right mouse button
Rotate camera Mouse wheel
Jump ALT
Cast spells C
Activate tools V
Rotate camera clockwise Y
Rotate camera counterclockwise X
Inventory I
Open/close map M
Open/close questlog Q
Pause/menu ESC
Weapon shortcut F1
Spell shortcut F2
Defense item shortcut F3
Tool shortcut F4
Use small healing potion F5
Use small mana potion F6
Quicksave F9
Load/save menu F11
Quickload F12



EMPIRE OF THE ANTS

Help - F1
Zoom In - +
Zoom Out - -
Turn Left - Numeric 4
Turn Right - Numeric 6
Move Forward - Up
Move Back - Down
Move Left - Left
Move Right - Right
Add icon to selection - Ctrl Click
Create An Army - Control + 1, 2,...9
Select An Army - 1, 2,...9

Select Army and Focus Camera - ALT 1,2,...9
Change Tabs - <>
Focus Camera on Anthill - H
Toggle To Outside/Inside Anthill - A
Laying List / Hatch Cycle - C
Work Preference - W
List Of Buildings - B
Patrol/Guard - G
Panic - P
Merge - F
Danger bring in workers - D
Zoom in on minimap - PAGE UP
Zoom out on minimap - PAGE DOWN

THE INCREDIBLE MACHINE

All controls are via the mouse
Intensity XS
All controls via mouse

JOURNEY'S END

up arrow key - moves forward
down arrow key - move backwards
left arrow key - turn left
right arrow key - turn right
control key - combat
space - activate/open door key

CONTROLS

KYODAI

All controls are via the mouse

TREADMARKS

Turn Left - Left
Turn Right - Right
Forward - Up
Reverse - Down
Gun Left - ,
Gun Right - .
Fire - Space/ Mouse
Chat - T
Team Chat - Y
Scores - TAB
Gun To Front - [
Gun To Back -]
Gun To Cam - P

GANGSTERS 2

Map Views
Scroll Screen (all map views) - Hold Down RMB + move mouse
Select Gangster - Click LMB on Gangster
Give Order to currently selected Gangster - Click LMB using Active Pointer
Deselect currently selected Character - Click RMB away from Character
Center Character/Vehicle and Track - Click RMB on Character/Vehicle
Select all Characters in Bound Box - Hold Down LMB and Drag Box
Open the Building Window - Point to Building, hold SHIFT + LMB
Open the Character Details Window - Point to Character, hold SHIFT + LMB
Gangster Windows
Select/Deselect Gangster - Click LMB on Gangster Window

Scroll to Gangster and Track - Click RMB on Gangster Window
Select additional Gangster Point to Gangster Window - Hold Down CTRL + LMB

LEGENDS OF MIGHT AND MAGIC

Mouse:
Mouse Movement - Look in any direction.
Mouse1 - Primary attack.
Mouse2 - Secondary attack
Wheel Display the weapon list
Keyboard:
A/D Strafe left/right.
W/S Move forward/backwards.
E Use item. (Open doors, pull switches, etc.)
SPACE Jump
Left-[Ctrl] Crouch
B Buy item. (Purchase weapons and armor in the designated area at the beginning of the round.)
G Drop current weapon.
T Talk. (Type a message to all players.)
Y Team Talk. (Type a message to your teammates.)
Z Team Commands.

[Tab] Current Player Statistics screen.
T Talk. (Type a message to all players.)

SERIOUS SAM

Move Forward - Arrow Up
Move Backward - Arrow Down
Up/Jump - Space/ R
Down/Duck - F. C
Turn Left - Arrow Left
Turn Right - Arrow Right
Look Up - A, Page Up
Look Down - Z, Page Down
Center View - Home, End
Walk - Left Shift
Walk/Run Toggle - Caps Lock
Strafe - Alt
Fire - Left Control
Reload - Tab
3rd person view - H
Use/Invoke NETRICA - Enter
Talk - T
Previous Weapon - [
Next Weapon -]
Flip Weapon - \
Knife - 1
Colt/Two Colts - 2
Single/Double Shotgun - 3
Tommygun/Minigun - 4

Rocket Launcher - 5
Grenade Launcher - 6
Laser - 7
Cannon - 8

REAL WAR

Mouse - Select units and give instructions
Control 1 - 8 Builds Task Forces
1-8 - Select a built task force
C - Config menu
Alt 1 - resets screen
Shift - Select multiple targets
Ctrl - Select multiple resources
A - Attacks
H - Help Menu
T - Show aquired targets in resource windows



HALL OF FAME

YOUR GUIDE TO THE GREATEST GAMES ON THE PLANET, CONVENIENTLY DIVIDED INTO RESPECTIVE GENRES. PERUSE THE PICK OF CURRENT TITLES, WHEN THEY WERE REVIEWED AND THEIR SCORE. THE LATEST GOLD AWARDS ARE LISTED TOO, SO YOU CAN BE UP ON THE ABSOLUTE LATEST. ANY GAMES YOU'VE MISSED ARE A BLIGHT ON YOUR REPUTATION PICK THEM UP AND FIND WHAT'S MISSING IN YOUR LIFE. PLAY IT LOUD, PLAY IT PROUD.

STRATEGY



Age of Empires 2: Age of Kings 94% . #42
Perfectly balanced affair with numerous races on the grand scale.



Black & White 92% . #60
Conquer the world with belief by controlling villagers and a giant beast.



Hostile Water 91% . #61
Combines FPS action with all kinds of strategy. Deploy and control units from a carrier.



Homeworld 95% . #41
Real Time mission-based epic boasts greatest camera and most beautiful 3D space ever.



Sacrifice 90% . #55
Magic-based real time combat strategy with one wizard and enormous maps.

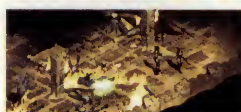
ROLEPLAYING



Planescape: Torment 91% . #46
Characters and combat used perfectly in a dense, emotive world. The greatest story ever.



Baldur's Gate II 93% . #53
Classes, skills, artifacts and extended gameplay in purest Dungeons & Dragons adventure.



Diablo 2: LOD 90% . #63
Hack'n'slash at its very finest. This addon adds on a hell of a lot on to this hellish game, and we love it!

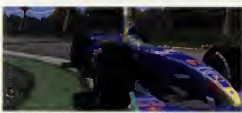


Jagged Alliance 2 89% . #42
Strong combat, tactics and extreme detail in this squad-based strategy.



Everquest 90% . #39
High fantasy and hi-tech meet in this stunning online extravaganza.

RACING



F1 Racing Championship 90% . #60
The best looking and fastest of its kind. The Ferrari of F1 sims.



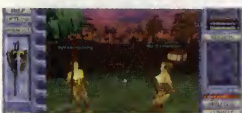
Grand Prix Legends 95% . #30
The old standard that gave new meaning to historical accuracy - and a real challenge!



Colin McRae 2 85% . #57
Superior physics, high realism and lean design. Just the rally essentials.

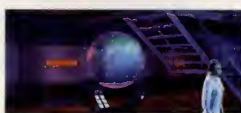


GP 500 96% . #43
Motorcycle Championship game in its own league. Superb racing in its own right.

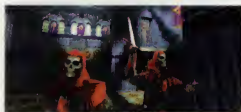


Grand Prix 3 88% . #53
Third instalment of the classic F1 series with amazing AI, weather and authenticity.

ACTION



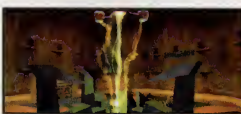
Deus Ex 98% . #51
The most complete games experience ever: FPS, RPG, whatever you wish.



Thief (I & II) 95% . #33
Pioneered stealth as the new way to kill and tension as the new adrenalin.



System Shock 2 98% . #42
Genre bending shocker where computers are mad and techno-fear is alive & well.



Half Life 98% . #31
New school FPS with awesome weapons, chilling script and great pacing.



Giants 86% . #58
Three species strategy hybrid with the most diverse play styles. Beautiful, stylish and long term.

READER'S TOP FIVE

My greatest gaming moment was my first Multiplayer game of Rogue Spear. I hadn't played it for ages but I'd just gotten ADSL so I figured I'd give it a go on the net. Without any idea of the keys I fragged every sucker in the level - Awesome!
Sekt

Send your Top Five games of all-time to: imho@pcpowerplay.com.au
Don't forget to tell us why!



1. Redline



2. Rogue Spear

3. Pegleg

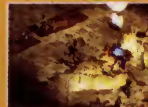
4. Age of Empires

5. Planetarian

RECENT GOLD AWARDS



Diablo 2: LOD
90% . #63



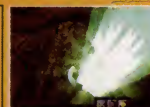
Worms: World Party
90% . #62



Hostile Waters
91% . #61



Summoner
90% . #61



Nascar Racing 4
93% . #60



Tribes 2
93% . #60



SPORT



Tony Hawk 2 92% . #58
Perfect blend of challenge, control and excitement in this X-large sports classic.



Links 2001 82% . #57
The finest example of PC golf on the planet.



FIFA 2001 84% . #57
The closest to football reality with a bigger pitch, best defense and nicest special moves.



NBA Live 2001 81% . #60
Backboard mayhem in the finest b-ball game to date.



Madden 2001 78% . #56
American football with the perfect engine and all prettied up.

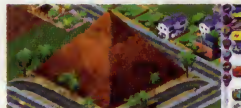
MANAGEMENT



The Sims 90% . #47
People simulation phenomenon offers complete domestic control.



RollerCoaster Tycoon 93% . #36
Maintain theme parks while building coasters, thrill rides and toilets



SimCity 3K 90% . #35
Finest in the classic series, guide your city from settlement to metropolis



Zeus 91% . #58
Reign in terror or glory over your little Greek worshippers

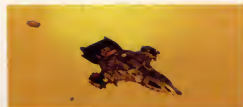


Championship Manager 00/01 90% . #57
Authentic soccer mayhem from the sidelines

FLIGHT SIM



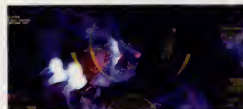
Mig Alley 92% . #42
Great mix of strategy, first class planning and a superb flight model.



I-War 2 85% . #63
Sequel of the highest quality that sets new standards for space sims



Falcon 4 98% . #33
Aerial thrills, high realism, the aging master of flight.



Freespace 2 95% . #44
Gorgeous visuals, stunning story, superb space battle action.



Jane's FA /18 91% . #37
High class, accessible, realistic top quality flight sim is the business

ONLINE



Tribes 2 93% . #60
The finest co-operative combat experience in the first person



Counter Strike 91% . #55
Half Life and team-based battle are the quintessential online experience



Quake 3 93% . #45
Slickest, simplest, most user-friendly deathmatch experience bar none



Unreal Tournament 94% . #45
Options and modes of play mean UT offers the goods for online deathmatch variety

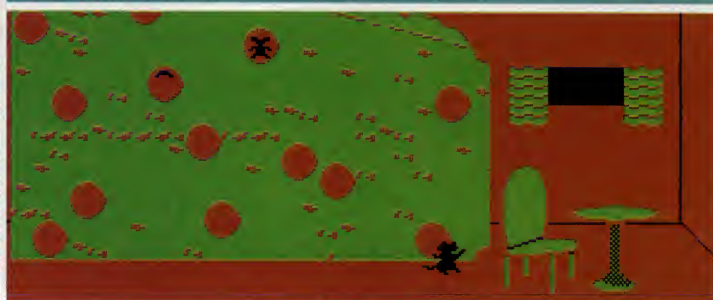
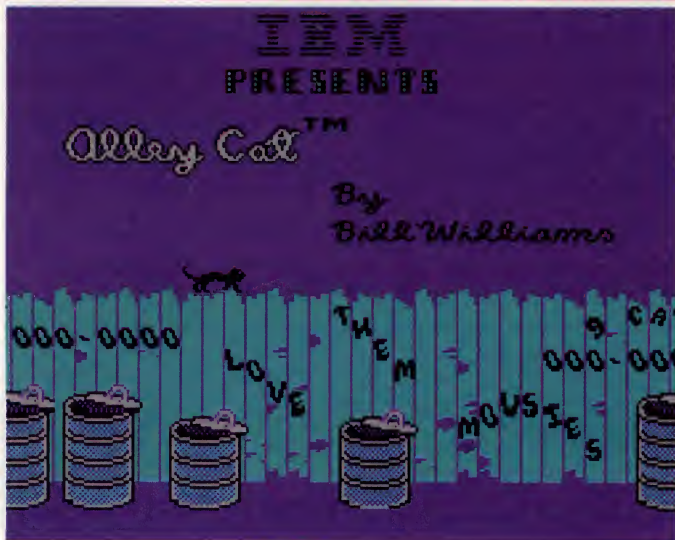


Worms: World Party 90% . #62
Premiere online puzzle strategy game. Command tiny worms with giant weapons

ALLEY CAT

IBM/SYNSOFT (1984)

"Love them mousies!"



There wasn't a lot you could do with 4-colour CGA graphics, but some games from the seminal XT phase of PC evolution were amongst the most innovative ever created. Games like Alley Cat.

The object was to control the eponymous Alley Cat in a typical day-in-the-life. You couldn't sit still for a

second, as vicious junkyard dogs would sweep the bottom of every environment, and your hub alley screen was subject to a constant rain of objects hurled from the tenants of the building in the background.

Your objective was to copulate like a wild animal with the posh house-cats of the neighbourhood. After completing a sub-mission, such as clearing the mice from a giant block of cheese, you would get a shot at true love. Make it past the rival suitors to

the top of the screen, and the bitch was yours! The screen would fill with love hearts, and you'd get another life!

Cheer-leading kittens would appear in a brief cutscene, and then you'd be dumped back in the alley again, with the difficulty upped a notch. The more you rooted, the more kittens would root for you, until eventually the screen would be full of them! These brief segues really made Alley Cat, whether it was a cartoon dog crooking its finger and going "here,

kitty kitty kitty!" or just the words "Oh No!" pulsing on a black background, every action had a consequence in a world that felt truly alive.

Plus, it had a sense of humour. In one mission you had to dive into a goldfish bowl and clear it. The only problem was the fish shared their little bubble with... electric eels! Alley Cat works fine on today's PCs: just prowl the abandonware sites for "cat.exe"

James Cottee



REVIEWS

Terminator: Skynet (94%)
Interstate 76 (93%)
Magic: The Gathering (91%)

THE ARCHIVE

FIVE YEARS AS AUSTRALIA'S AUTHORITY ON PC GAMING

PCPP#12 MAY 1997

Our twelfth edition boasted perhaps the most striking PCPP cover ever: an explosive image of Kurt, the protagonist of Shiny's much-vaunted MDK. This was the game that seemed to have it all. A cool yet enigmatic name, a stylish main character, a stunning 3D engine, several innovative gameplay concepts, and the design pedigree of, well, Earthworm Jim behind it, Shiny's shooter should have been a hit. With wide open outdoors areas and frequent use of the sniper rifle, in some ways it was ahead of its time.

In the end though, it wasn't quite what we were expecting. Those who weren't distracted by the platform jumping, the warped sense of humour and the savegame issues, enjoyed a supremely playable - if somewhat eccentric - gaming experience. Those who didn't, hated it. Sadly, it flopped.

And to prove that some things never change, PCPP#12 also featured a huge round-up of joysticks, steering wheels, gamepads and assorted peripherals. Ben Mansill had to hospitalised for a month after vigorously testing over 30 sticks. We also detailed our first encounter with Unreal, courtesy of a Thai lunch with Epic's Mark Rein, apparently. Discussion of the game's graphics engine took up 80% of our preview, with 20% left for gameplay commentary. Fittingly, this emphasis seemed to reflect Epic's own focus during the game's development.

"It's almost done though, they say, and should be out soon."
Us, previewing Unreal, over a year before it was actually done.

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PC active

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ISSUE 10 • AUGUST 2001 • \$7.50 (inc GST) NZ \$8.50 (inc GST)

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Hot new video editing suite from Adobe



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Create blockbusters at home



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What services are on offer from which banks?

BUDGET PCs

The best bang for \$1,500 bucks



New Windows

We examine the new .NET Server



PC Upgrading

More info on how to get the most from your PC

Total E3

Our look at the world's biggest gaming expo



PC active

2 CDS! VOLUME 10 AUGUST 2001

MYST III EXILE

Test drive the long-awaited sequel to the highest-selling PC game of all time.

HUGE DEMO. Spans 2 Cds
You'll also find the Myst III trailer, desktop themes and wallpaper.

Free software

Save time downloading. Check out these great language applications and multilingual dictionaries.



PLUS:

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YELLOW BOOTS

LIFE'S BATTLE

A qualitative review by Captain (ret) George Chastity-Thorn

Hello. As a valued community leader it is my pleasement to step into the space left behind the two yellowish boots that once stood here but are currently standing in an exotic offshore locationalisation reconsiderafying their options now we find ourself approachamating the end of the financialistical year. I recently receptionalised an electrographic telecommunicationalism from the boots, who are both members of my community, and I am happy to acquiesce to their request that I provide some entertaining 'content' for their magavisual columnation.

Specificationally, I would like to take this opportunity to provide a criticalistic reviewification of my favourite electronic entertainment title, Life's Battle. This fine piece of software is an educational title published by Hummer Software. Life's Battle is primarilistically a religious piece, but I can appreciate that in these rough and tumble cosmopolitan days, religified literature is, shall we say, rather less than fish du jour. Or even potatoes a la nuit. So allow me to set my focalisation not on the subtle religious undertextualism of Life's Battle, but rather on the wholesome entertainistical pleasures this title offers.

Like such allegedly popularistic titles as Quake 3 Arena and Unreal Tournament, Life's Battle is, as the screenshots revealificate, a First Person Adventure. The protagonalisater travels through a mystical allegorical land meeting various wholesome community based challenges.

This can be likened to my recent stint in the territorial army where I was fortunallistic enough to lead a charge on an important militaristical target. My skills had been honed by Life's Battle so such a high degree that I was able to completely defeatificate the oppositionalisticalisers, and also send a strict message to our nation's youth. Because the real problem with Life's Battle is not that the graphics are, shall we say, not exactly potatoes a la nuit, it is not that some of the control mechanilisationisms are difficult to gripificate, it's that not enough of our great nation's youth is playing this game. And the penultimate message Life's Battle sends to our great nation's youth is that the Government is on our side and it is perfectly acceptibalistic to acceptificate every little thing the Government tells you!

Well let me tellify you, were it not for my six years of bloody service in the name of the Territorial Army and all those militaristic targets I destroyed, the Government we have today would be a damn side less tolerant of



ONLINE

www.hummersoftware.com
Downloadificate Life's Battle here
www.army.mod.uk/ta
Search hard enough and you might see me in the background of some of the stock footage of exploding things.

games like Life's Battle and other critical, radical literature such as the works of Thomas Keneally, and you, the reading publicans, would not be able to enjoy them!

So if its amazificating adventure and rich story-based travel that wets your proverbial, religificated whistle, then Life's Battle is definitely worthy of the very high mark I am destined to award it, but please keep in mind that the Government is our enemy and because of this, Life's Battle cannot receive a Gold Award, until it and it's developers realise that the real enemy is the man in Canberra with the list with my name on it.

So please consider Life's Battle, which can be purchasificated for free at www.hummersoftware.com for a minimum free fee.

Captain (ret) George Chastity-Thorn

PCPP

OVERALL
Refreshing break,
but much too pro-
Government

89%

YOUR PARENTS ARE MIND-EATING ZOMBIES

Please disregardificate the terrible propaganda furnished by this title, Life's Battle, and become aware of the terrible truth that your parents have been replaced by mind-eating zombies (see picture). This was part of a plot by the Government which I and a number of other inmates, sorry, soldiers attempted to reveal to the public some time ago, but since our tragic fallure I am no longer given access to sharp objects such as letter openers and plastic spoons. Yes Nurse, I have had my medicine thank you... now why did I write that down?

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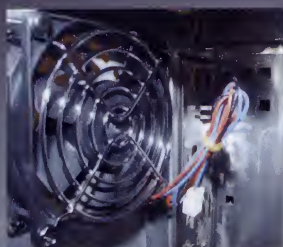
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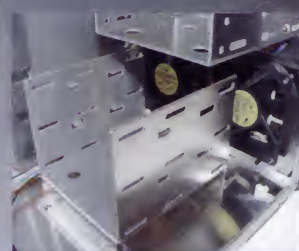
Rear fan cools CPU



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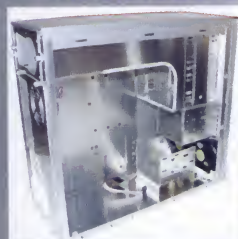
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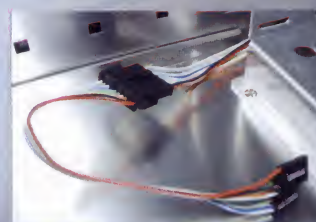
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